



A longitudinal study of the experiences and concerns of postgraduate Chinese students studying Art & Design in a UK university

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DECLARATION:

I, Barry John McGowan, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

Signature:

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading 'B. McGowan', with a long, sweeping horizontal line underneath.

Mr Barry John McGowan

TOTAL WORD COUNT: 74,997

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research was to enhance our understanding of the experiences of visiting Chinese students throughout the duration of their two-year postgraduate studies in creative programmes in a UK university. The specific areas examined were: one, the students' perceptions of, and perspectives on, their academic and social experiences; and two, identifying how such experiences changed or developed as the students progressed through the two-years of their studies.

The research involved a two-year longitudinal study of Chinese students who arrived in September 2009 at a well-known Art College in London. These students were enrolled on art and design postgraduate courses that placed a premium upon the ability to use their imagination to generate new ideas and then develop such ideas in an innovative manner. The study examined the possibility that as such courses do not base themselves on established bodies of knowledge or transmissive pedagogies, that it could possibly challenge the students' prevailing epistemological concepts and pedagogical assumptions.

The method of enquiry was via a qualitative methodology within an interpretative approach, utilising data obtained by audio-recorded, semi-structured interviews, following British Educational Research Association guidelines. Three sets of interviews were undertaken with each student: near the beginning, at the middle and at the end of their two-year courses, thereby fulfilling the longitudinal basis of this study. The approach to analysis was characterised by thematic coding with a focus on understanding the 'themes of concern' from the narrative accounts gathered from the interview data.

Originally it had been anticipated that challenges arising from the nature of the programmes, specifically the focus on creativity and criticality, would be the main difficulty the students would encounter. However it ultimately emerged that their lack of colloquial English, pedagogical issues and socio-cultural difficulties would be their major problems. However, whilst these three main challenges were identified by all of the students there was significant variation in their perceived impact on individual students over the two year duration of the programme.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

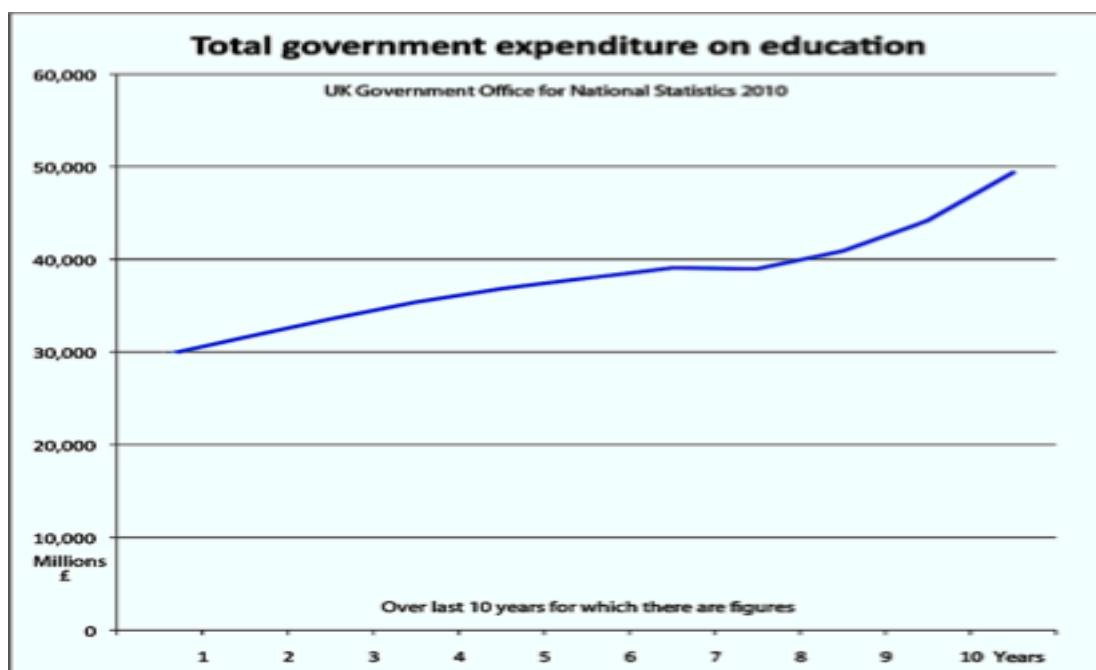
This research had its origins in concerns that were privately voiced to this author by colleagues at a highly regarded UK university as to the genuine value of the teaching and learning that international students were receiving at that particular establishment. These concerns were later reinforced by a number of sources (Universities UK 2006, Guardian 2010) and especially by the British Council Chief Executive Martin Davidson who warned, in a Press Release, against British universities “embarking on crude international recruitment drives just to boost their finances” (Davidson 2010:1).

Until approximately 2010 substantial UK Government funding had flowed into British education (see Figure 1, page 10) and this along with the substantial growth in finances provided by the fees of an increasing number of international students (see Figure 2, page 13), had provided a significant monetary benefit for many universities. Yet, within my own university the resources specifically allocated to international students had remained virtually static (Hagman 2010), despite the fact that some students had been reported as facing difficulties adjusting to the prevailing UK pedagogic system (Choo 2007, McClure 2007).

Concerns such as these are obviously worrying to anyone who appreciates excellence in education in all its many forms. Faced with such a situation, it was evident that if these students were to ever receive the education they deserved then changes would have to be made. But what changes, and how to make them? It was immediately apparent that before any changes could be undertaken it would be necessary to find out what was actually happening ‘at the grassroots’, before deciding what had to be changed, and how.

I left my colleagues discussing their situation while I returned to the students in my own university. The discussion had left me wondering whether the circumstances within their university were any different from the circumstances within mine. Were international students in my college being treated as ‘cash cows’ (as Martin Davidson had implied in his Press Release of 2010)? I began to seriously consider

Figure 1: The UK Government educational expenditure 2000-2010



Source: UK Government Office for National Statistics. Accessed 14/7/11.

examining the situation that existed at the university in London where I worked. Eventually, after much consideration, I determined to research the experiences of the postgraduate international students at my own campus. It was then that I realised the overwhelming scale of what I had decided to do and, after further thought, I determined to limit the extent of the research by concentrating upon a single national or cultural grouping. The East Asian contingent of students came immediately to mind, as they were the largest and fastest growing overseas grouping within my own institution. After taking advice from several colleagues and doing some preliminary research, I decided to focus specifically upon the students from the Greater China Region (GCR), which comprises the People's Republic of China (PRC), Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macau. Accordingly, the term Chinese will therefore be used throughout this study to describe individuals from the GCR. In particular, I wanted to understand and explain to others, the academic and personal experiences of these Chinese students and how their experiences might change and develop over the duration of their two years of study. I was interested in whether these visiting Chinese students may be at a disadvantage when studying in highly creative Art and Design courses in the UK that do not base themselves on established bodies of knowledge or transmissive pedagogies. An illustration of the creativity expected from a student on

such an Art and Design postgraduate course in the UK can be gleaned from these quotes from the prospectus of the university in question:

“These programmes range from the highly conceptual to the deeply practical, however all share a strong culture of experimentation, innovation and debate within differing approaches and curricula. Their shared aim is to provide a dynamic and vibrant environment that encourages risk and originality, diversity in thinking, opinions and ideologies”. (Harrow 2016 : University prospectus).

“Innovation Design is a leading-edge, creative product development course that involves experimentation, design, engineering and enterprise activities . . . learn new tools for innovation, practice ideation and visualisation skills to realise design innovation . . . we believe that design is a verb not a noun” (Pennington & Childs 2016 : University prospectus).

I was concerned that these UK courses might challenge the students’ prevailing epistemological concepts and pedagogical assumptions because of the abrupt transition from the students previously strict, linear educational practices that have been portrayed in the literature (Hofstede 1980, Ballard & Clanchy 1985, Redding 1990, Biggs & Watkins 1996). However, as this research was to be undertaken within a college that exclusively taught postgraduate Art and Design it was not going to be possible to carry out any comparisons between A&D students and others from differing disciplines. Therefore although this study was to specifically research Art & Design students it was not a comparison study with other disciplines. It was to be purely an analysis of the experiences and concerns of Chinese postgraduate students studying within a creative art and design environment in the UK, that was in *prima facie* terms at variance with the students preceding pedagogical experiences (Ng 2001, Wu 2004, Rudowicz 2004). These authors assert that:

“Education policy and practice in almost every Chinese society neglect and/or discourage students’ curious exploration and independent thinking, intrinsic motivation and other factors that are conducive to creativity”. (Wu 2004:169).

“In practice, teaching efforts orientated towards nurturing creativity are missing . . . thus, school is considered to be a place of learning by rote or recitation in unison”. (Rudowicz 2004:68).

There will undoubtedly be intellectual, as well as physical, peaks and troughs in any international students’ period of study. One cannot expect a straightforward linear transition from one culturally diverse educational environment to another. Students will undoubtedly encounter various difficulties whilst transitioning between pedagogical practices, and the probable requirement for continuing acclimatisation suggests the need for a longitudinal study. It is the responsibility of all educationalists to facilitate every visiting student’s transition from their previous educational surroundings to the new, whilst at the same time enabling learning to continue.

This research will assist our understanding of the students learning experiences and the effect that this may have upon their teaching and learning situations within the UK (Huddleston 2011). This study will identify the students’ experiences through all of the varied changes that may occur during their entire two-year courses.

The introductory chapter provides an outline of the longitudinal study undertaken in this thesis. It begins by explaining the motivation and background for the undertaking of this research and continues with a description of the significance of this study whilst also discussing the limitations of previous research studies. A description of the research questions posed, and the associated methodology to be used, will thereby bring this first chapter to a conclusion.

Why Chinese students choose to study in the UK

Chinese art and design postgraduate students who study abroad do so in the belief, states Cheng (2002), that they will obtain a greater width and depth of artistic education than is available in their own countries. Since the early 1990s, the number of Chinese students coming to Britain for graduate studies has significantly increased (see Figure 2, page 13). These students have been particularly welcomed by universities, not only for their fiscal support of British higher education, but also for bringing huge cultural diversity to the campuses. Additionally, the significant

contribution to academic research work that they have made, on many levels, should not be underestimated (United Kingdom Council for International Student Affairs [UKCISA] 2004).

Figure 2: The top ten (non-EU) countries sending students to the UK

Top ten non-EU countries	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14
China (PRC)	67,325	78,715	83,790	87,895
India	39,090	29,900	22,385	19,750
Nigeria	17,585	17,620	17,395	18,020
Malaysia	15,555	16,335	15,015	16,635
United States of America	13,900	14,545	16,235	16,485
Hong Kong	10,440	11,335	13,065	14,725
Saudi Arabia	10,270	9,860	9,440	9,060
Singapore	4,480	5,250	6,020	6,790
Pakistan	10,185	8,820	7,185	6,665
Canada	5,905	6,115	6,190	6,350

Source: UKCISA website (<http://www.ukcisa.org.uk/content/2196/International-students-in-UK-HE#Top-non-EU-sending-countries>). Accessed 18/11/15.

The UKCISA data clearly shows that the Peoples Republic of China (PRC) provides the largest contingent of non-EU students within the UK higher education system. When students from Hong Kong are also included, the number of students from the Greater China Region (GCR) adds up to over 100,000 students.

Zhu (2007) suggests that to understand why so many Chinese students travel to the UK to continue their Art and Design (A&D) education it is necessary to understand the artistic situation that exists within the Greater China Region. He believes that Chinese heritage arts and culture is becoming more open to western ideas and influences and this, along with the increased modernisation of their economies, is fuelling a huge expansion in societal expectations in all directions and at all levels. Mainland China, in particular, is seeing the greatest transformation in the entire East Asiatic region, as their countries' infrastructure is being rapidly modernised and their long-standing social structure is straining to adapt likewise (Ran 2007). Within the last few generations, the people of China have seen the most turbulent changes to their lives, ranging from the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) to the adoption of a 'Chinese version' of a capitalist economy (1990 onwards). Although some of the

‘old order’ of politicians may still be in positions of influence, the speed of change is quickening by the day as China is ‘feeling its way’ towards a new era of expansionist modernity (Zhu 2007).

Kelly (2008) writes that “Chinese artistic circles have been rapidly expanding and westernising for many years” and this has had the effect of increasing the requirement, by the business community, for graduates from the creative arts who have specifically been educated in European or American institutions. Zhu (2007) posits that contemporary art throughout the region continues to advance as artists discover new materials and techniques alongside progressive approaches to medium, form and method. Additionally Ran (2007) argues that these artists and designers have developed a new vision that tends to mirror the present relational positions of Chinese society, focusing on topics such as the class structure and the developing materialistic society within China today. All of which indicates a growing artistic acceptability for the newly emerging modern Chinese artistic community, which is where the participating students of today should one day take their place.

Since the millennium, new young artists throughout the Greater China Region have been working in a vastly different atmosphere from their colleagues of the past. Not only do they live in a region experiencing continuous and extremely rapid economic development but also the precise urban environment that they inhabit is constantly changing around them (Kelly 2008, Vickers & Zeng 2010). As globalisation continues, western culture is having an increasingly powerful impact upon the entire region. It has been stated by Yuan Guiren, the PRC Minister of Education, that as well as expanding and modernising their industrial base, China also needs to explore ways of developing its artistic heritage, which will provide a platform for dialogue with the rest of the creative world. International exchanges, PRC Government sponsored workshops and cooperation with foreign countries has therefore now become priorities in the ongoing development of Chinese art and design. One part of this development is the participation of Chinese postgraduate students in foreign courses of Art and Design (A&D), such as those available within the UK. Therefore, considered as a whole, these explanations clarify the expansion in student numbers

on Art and Design courses in terms of the needs and modernisation of Chinese society.

Nonetheless, when students and teachers originate from different countries and cultures, the potential for disharmony exists which can cause debilitating effects within the classroom setting (Delpit 1995, McMillon & Edwards 2000, McMillon 2001). Anything that interferes with the teaching and learning process needs to be properly understood so that we can learn from it and seek to develop procedures to ensure it does not recur. Although there has been research into cross-cultural education on many levels, most of it has been carried out upon undergraduates, not postgraduates, and usually on a group or class footing and rarely on an individual basis. Furthermore, the research has been upon students participating in courses of far more conservative and conventional academic disciplines such as Business Studies or Economics (Cheng 2002). Within creative programmes of study more research needs to be undertaken upon international postgraduate students, and their academic needs and personal requirements, with such research being sensitive to the diverse experiences of such individuals. It is important that this research is undertaken now so that effective ways of preparing teachers to meet the individual needs of such a varied student population can be devised and perfected.

The continual process of globalisation has dramatically increased the number of Chinese students coming to study in the UK (UKCISA 2015), and with the arrival of such students comes the possibility of accessing knowledge of their indigenous educational system for potential use within the UK. Singh (2009) suggests that this could offer the prospect of shaking Western education free from its insularity that always seems to focus on the pursuit of academic material from within the boundaries of Western Europe or North America. Western education, he argues, could be more culturally inclusive as a way of enlarging and revitalising Eurocentric forms of education (Singh 2009).

With their newfound westernised education, many of the Chinese students who have been studying abroad expect to return home to China after graduation, with a more original incisiveness to their personal reflections upon the world and their own place within it (Li 2006). Hau et al (2006) argue that, in return, such students wish to bring

Chinese contemporary visual arts to the notice of the international art world. With students from the Greater China Region now forming an ever-growing proportion of the international community within universities of the western world, this is probably a very realistic aspiration.

Limitations of previous research

This research is centrally situated within the context of substantial growth of international students studying in UK universities that are providing courses that are not readily available within their own countries (Chan 1999), with programmes emphasising creativity being amongst such courses. This study will investigate the concerns, adjustments and re-alignments that the participating Chinese postgraduate students experience over their two year programme.

Whilst reviewing previously published literature within this specific area of interest it became apparent that there were limitations in some of the previous research. Three traits were particularly evident and especially significant for this study.

Firstly, much of the existing literature positions Western and Chinese education systems and their students in terms of ‘binary opposites’, thereby opening up the situation to misunderstandings and possible bad practice (Ryan & Louie 2007). Too often, Western and Chinese values are characterised as completely separate and unchanging. All Westerners, and in turn all Chinese, are usually shown as ‘all being of the same kind’. When of course in reality every person is different from every other person: we are all individuals. Where Westerners are described as individualistic, the Chinese will often be described as conformist (ibid). If Westerners are called adversarial, the Chinese will be called harmonious (ibid). Such labels are also uncritically attributed to both of the education systems and communities of practice, and do not take account of the real diversity and complexity of contemporary social, academic and cultural circumstances. Nor do they take account of how actions occur within individual contexts. Ritualistic and generalised responses characterise much of the literature surrounding Western and Chinese educational situations and this needs to be uncovered, brought into the light and challenged at every opportunity.

Secondly, and closely related, is that much of the prevailing literature has been influenced by cultural explanations to analyse and describe the experiences of Chinese students. The picture that is often painted of Chinese or Confucian learners is a caricature of rote learning, memorisation and passivity. Such stereotypes are not only deceptive but they can also be highly unreliable. China, as a nation, is changing at an increasingly fast pace and their educational system is changing likewise. What may have been true just a few years ago is now very different. Contemporary authors, many of them Asian, have noted that some Chinese educationalists are not only receptive to, but actually adopting, new modes of learning which are current with the most modern of Western thinking. This is causing reinterpretations to be made, by some writers, of the entire Chinese educational situation. Nevertheless, at the moment, most prevailing literature still defines Chinese students' with labels such as 'Confucian learners', which in turn is encouraging Western teachers to do likewise. Such labels may provide convenient categories but they risk creating crude generalisations that deny the complexity and variation of individuals and their separate experiences.

Thirdly, foreign students in general and Chinese students in particular are often seen as "bearers of problems rather than bearers of culture" (Ryan 2012:10). Their perceived deficits, whether language or society-based, are often remediated by teaching staff through front-loading or add-on programmes rather than any fundamental reviewing of the course curriculum (Ryan 2012). This use of add-on programmes, and the referring of Chinese students to enrol in them, is often used by tutors as a first-resort rather than a last-resort to any problems that may arise. Such action appears to take any responsibility away from tutors and ostensibly refers it to someone else. This negation of responsibility may be emotionally possible because of an association of a lack of language proficiency with a lack of ability (Chalmers & Volet 1997), viewing them as a group and not as individuals, and not fully appreciating the complexities of second language learning, especially within an unfamiliar environment. Such tutors might focus on negative behaviours rather than positive, and may even misinterpret some behaviour as negative simply due to differences in cultural responses (Ryan & Slethaug 2010).

Significance of this research

This study focuses on Chinese postgraduate students enrolled in innovative UK Art and Design programmes. *Prima facie*, there would seem to be a potential disjuncture in the prior pedagogic experiences of the Chinese students and those employed in the art and design courses at many UK Art Colleges. Specifically these courses are not based upon established bodies of knowledge but instead place a considerable value upon individual originality and creativeness. Given this, what effect will this have upon the experiences of these Chinese students?

Currently available literature has customarily focussed research onto the experiences of international students at undergraduate level, and predominantly in the more conventionally popular and academic disciplines such as economics or business studies. Therefore research into more creative postgraduate artistic studies is practically non-existent. This study therefore breaks new ground in examining an under-explored area, both in terms of the specific nationality of the participating students and their choice of academic programme.

Although there exist previous studies of the experiences of Chinese students in Western universities, almost all of this is of a short-term and one-off nature, often via questionnaires and surveys. Such research can give an informative ‘snapshot’ of students’ academic and social experiences whilst at university, but by its very nature is unable to show the extended and comprehensive changes which students experience throughout their entire programmes of study. It also tends to describe overall patterns and is less able to distinguish the varied experiences of individuals.

Additionally, the two-year duration of this longitudinal research project not only allows for an extended linear study of the process of the students academic development, from their arrival to their final departure, but it also allows for expansive cross-sectional studies at any points of particular importance.

Developing aims, objectives and research questions

One of the overall goals of this research is to encourage a broader debate about Chinese art and design students’ concerns and adjustments while studying within the

UK educational system. I believe that this research study will contribute to providing a deeper understanding and help identify good practice by describing and analysing the educational experiences of such students. This should in turn help to raise the largely silent voices of all visiting Chinese students, and other international students, and thereby help to ensure that such students gain full access to all of their necessary educational requirements (Cai 2008) and can then develop to their maximum potential.

The aims and objectives of this research study are:

AIMS: *To understand the experiences and concerns of individual Chinese students who attend postgraduate studies in creative disciplines within a UK university and to investigate how these experiences may change over the full two-year period of their UK university course.*

OBJECTIVES: *To better understand the learning requirements of such students, thereby enabling teachers to better assist the students learning..*

Accordingly, the two research questions that this thesis examined were:

1. *What are the experiences and concerns of Chinese students studying within postgraduate creative programmes in a UK university environment?*
2. *How do these experiences and concerns change throughout their two-year course?*

The justification behind the selection of the first research question was the desire to pursue a wide-ranging and open-ended enquiry that could encompass all of the students possible ‘lived-in experiences’ within their UK educational settings. I wanted this study to follow the data provided by the students and avoid imposing on that data a preconceived interpretative framework. That required uncovering all that I could from each and every individual participants experience. That data could then allow me to focus in upon their individual concerns and thereby report them, so that we may all learn from them. Which leads to the second research question, where the focus shifts to allow the study to explore how the responses to Research Question 1 changed during the two years the students were on the programme. This longitudinal

dimension of the study ensures that the study recognises the possibility that the students concerns were not static and changed over the two years of the programme.

The method of investigation

The planned method of investigation for this research was by means of a qualitative longitudinal methodology, using data obtained via recorded open-ended, semi-structured interviews that were to be supplemented by a structured on-line questionnaire.

The study was to cover the entire duration of the students' two-year postgraduate studies, with the interviews carried out at three key points in their courses: first, three months from the beginning; second, in the middle; and third, at the end. This allowed for changes that occurred to be investigated and fully documented in a longitudinal manner. The interviews and the questionnaire were each planned to address separate aspects of the research, with the different means employed offering differing depth and levels of generality. The interview data provided an in-depth exploration of students' individual academic and social experiences, whereas the questionnaire data was intended to provide basic background information and an early insight into their expectations and previous educational practices. The verbatim content of the interview was examined using thematic analysis whereby themes would be extracted from the professionally transcribed texts of the interviews. The most frequently found, or unexpected, categories of concerns and themes were investigated in depth to explore students', or multiples of students', unique or multiple perspectives. Additionally, any views, approaches or models particularly dissimilar from the median norm would also be analytically investigated.

Unfortunately, upon completion of the on-line questionnaire by the students, and a systematic interrogation of it by the researcher, there was found to be little of value within it as the respondents had replied in such a deferential manner. This lack of value in the questionnaire was, on investigation, due to my poor induction of the students that ultimately caused the results to be unusable. Therefore with the circumstances so muddled, and insufficient time left to repeat it, the decision was taken to abandon the questionnaire. Although I thanked them for their good intentions, I gently explained to the students that it would be far more beneficial to

the research process if they would communicate their answers in a more accurate and impartial manner in the future. This they agreed to do. Further details of the adjustments that had to be made to the planned methodology of this study, due to the abandoning of the questionnaire, are described in more detail in chapter three.

Summary

In this introductory chapter I have endeavoured to paint a broad picture of the participating students' contextual circumstances upon their arrival in the UK. I have also outlined my personal motivation for undertaking this research and my perceived limitations of previous studies together with the associated significance of this study. The aims, objectives and research questions have also been defined herein, along with an explanation of the chosen method of investigation and analysis.

Chapter two will present a review of literature associated with the theme of this study, specifically international students and their academic and social experiences within their educational establishments. It will act as a filtering and framing system to review and modify the ideas of earlier authors and thereby update selected relevant material to the requirements of this study. The chapter progresses from an initial discussion of the wide-ranging perspectives within earlier literature, and how these authors interpreted the student context within their own works, up to the academic and sociocultural contexts of Chinese students today.

The third chapter explains this study's chosen research methodology and the methods used to attain its aims and objectives. A longitudinal research perspective will be assumed that will cover the full two years of their university courses, thereby allowing their experiences and concerns to be observed in greater detail over the entire length of their programmes.

Chapter four will be divided into three related sections, the first will describe and analyse the findings from the initial set of interviews. The following two sections will follow the same format with regard to the intermediate and final sets of interviews, with each of the sections concluding with an evaluation and interpretation of their findings.

The final chapter will summarise and reflect upon the entire research study, including the answers to the two research questions that the study had set out to address from the beginning. It will begin with a description of the background circumstances of the study and continue with an explanation of the implications of the research. It will also contextualise discussion of aspects of the research findings that identify and emphasise their importance. Recommendations will follow, with some suggestions for further research until concluding with a final comment.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter reviews the literature applicable to this study, develops a framework that informs this enquiry and explains where such research fits into the body of knowledge of which it is a part. Reviewing the literature is important not only to gain knowledge of the subject area but also to identify any gaps in our knowledge. As Wellington (2000:34) explains, “Your job is not just to mould your own brick but to slot it into the wall of existing understanding in that field”. The literature review further acts as a refining and reformulating support system enabling a rethink and refocus of the research topic.

With the two research questions of this thesis in mind, this review explores the writings of various authors, but with the subject matter remaining consistently focussed upon the academic or social experiences of Chinese, and other international students, engaged in university studies. All possible influences on those same experiences are within the remit of this review. Whilst remarkably little has been written that simultaneously covers the totality of the elements addressed in this study, much is available that separately covers each of the individual elements.

Within the following sections, I transition from an introductory discussion of the broad perspectives in the current literature upon the sociocultural contexts of Chinese and international students to concentrate upon how certain authors have interpreted these contexts within their own writings.

Pattern of developmental models

On examining the literature describing the approaches of Chinese students to studying at home and overseas, I identified a distinct pattern in the literature from the 1990’s to the present. That pattern consisted of four linked but diverse ‘models’, each with a different core conception of how Chinese students are represented. The models were developmental in that they referred or reacted to previous models (see Figure 3, page 24). and they were both sequential over time and overlapping.

Although broadly segmented into ten-year divisions, each of the models overlapped or ran concurrently with another's timelines, with each neither wholly inclusive nor exclusive of the other. I do not claim that the four models I identified were the only approaches or interpretations of the literature, but they were the predominant and prevailing approaches to analysing Chinese students during those time periods. They also seemed to reflect broadly the ways in which international students were perceived within Western societies in the respective time periods. I believe the four models provide a novel and effective means for describing and distinguishing a complex body of literature.

Figure 3: The four developmental models

1980s: The 'deficiency model'. Examples: Hofstede, Ballard & Clanchy, Redding

1990s: The 'misconceptions model'. Examples: Biggs & Watkins, Cortazzi & Jin

2000s: The 'repositioning model'. Examples: Xu, Gu & Schweisfurth

2010s: The 'individuality model'. Examples: Ryan, Radclyffe-Thomas

These models provide a structure for this chapter, which is configured so that each model is addressed in turn with connections made to my research study. Each is analysed to include the writings or viewpoints of various authors, a detailed analysis of their findings and of their connections to my research thesis. The chapter will then continue with an assessment of specific studies that are relevant to my own, with cross-comparisons drawn to my four original 'models', before concluding with a brief summary of the entire chapter.

THE 'DEFICIENCY MODEL'

In 1980, Hofstede wrote an influential book titled *Culture's Consequences*. He explored the way in which culture predisposes our individual thinking and thereby our learning processes. Hofstede's work underpins many of the studies that emphasise the role of culture on the acquisition of knowledge (Ballard & Clanchy 1985, Redding 1990). Hofstede argued that people carry "mental programmes" (2001:xix) that develop within the family during infancy and that are reinforced by school systems and other societal interactions. These mental programmes, he states,

include components of national culture. Indeed, my own research partly supports Hofstede's findings regarding such 'social reinforcing' and illustrates the effect that 'travelling abroad to study' can play upon the personal development of such students by allowing them to observe and interact with people of differing cultures in ways which affect their mental programmes.

Hofstede's 1980 work was used by authors Ballard & Clanchy (1985) and Redding (1990) to advance what I term the 'deficiency model' that emerged and became influential in explaining an approach to the experiences of Chinese students. They argued that Chinese students were academically deficient as they only learnt by rote or repetition without any genuine or deep understanding of what they were learning; according to Ballard and Clanchy (1985) this negative explanation was determined by culture. Their work, along with that of Redding (1990), contains probably the most powerful examples of stereotypical and negative portrayals of Chinese students. For example Ballard and Clanchy describe the traditional Chinese educational approach as based upon, and perpetuating, a "culture of dependent learners in a didactic, knowledge-focused classroom" (1997:77) rather than the Western approach with "collaborative learners organising and managing their own learning processes" (1997:77). This was a continuation of, and reinforcement to, Redding's (1990) position, when he stated:

"There is a reluctance to make individual decisions and accept personal responsibility . . . they tend to look upward for direction and guidelines, even when they are inappropriate. Loyalty is more rewarded than daring and initiative." (Redding 1990:173).

Redding (1990) argued that Chinese students displayed five specific characteristics that could be taken to summarise their way of thinking and learning. These were: emphasis on perception of the concrete idea; non-development of abstract thought; emphasis on particulars not universals; practicality as the central focus; and concern for reconciliation, harmony and balance. Redding (1990) infers from these characteristics that they are entirely culturally derived from the Chinese national character.

“The feature of Chinese organisations . . . is their overall paternalistic corporate culture. It means that personal relationships and feelings about other people are likely to come before more objectively defined concerns such as organisational efficiency, or neutral assessment of abilities. It turns the organisation into a world where who you know is more important than, or at least as important as, what you know.” (Redding 1990:165).

Redding’s (1990) negative portrayal of Chinese students learning styles included the claims that critical thinking was essentially a Western skill and unvalued in non-Western cultures. This idea was later echoed by Atkinson (1997:89) who asserted that critical thinking “is cultural thinking”, and that Western ideas of individualism and self-expression underlie it. He suggested that Chinese students were lacking in critical thinking skills when he argued that learners from such cultures are less proficient in critical thinking because they are “socialised into the twin normative social values of empathy and conformity” (Atkinson 1997:80). Atkinson therefore cautioned Western teachers of English as a second language (L2) that they should be careful of following “the critical thinking bandwagon” (Atkinson 1997:87). Similarly, Ramanathan and Atkinson (1999:61) argued that a critical approach might contravene “sociocultural norms”.

Other authors, writing more recently, such as Thompson and Gui (2000), Woodrow & Sham (2001) and Catterall et al (2002), extended this perspective, though in a less negative manner, by stating that Chinese students seem to prefer ‘passive teaching methods’ such as lectures and demonstrations. These authors argue that their research indicates that most Chinese students respond to a more structured way of learning using more passive methods, such as handouts, academic readings, formal lectures or systematised videos. They continue this line of reasoning by arguing that problem-solving and explorative teaching methods that are employed in the West are not easily compatible with the presumed Confucian preference for rote learning that exists in China. For example, they state:

“National culture is a determinant factor in learners’ learning approach preferences with Eastern and Western learners holding differing

pedagogical preferences. Western learners accept involvement and learning through their own discovery and exploration. Chinese learners expect the teacher to lead and provide learning points, and they prefer a passive approach to learning” (Thompson and Gui 2000:53).

Thompson and Gui (2000) and also Waller (1993) maintain that the development of any problem-solving abilities amongst Chinese students appears to have been largely ignored within their own educational system. They argue that this situation is compounded when the students’ achievements are assessed principally through written examinations that are not designed to test either their aptitude in working with others or in solving practical problems.

Other writers such as Harding (1997) have claimed that:

“Chinese students may be more concrete and pragmatic in evaluating ideas than their western counterparts, but they may also suffer from a lack of creativity, as well as being less likely to explore new directions to which they are unaccustomed. These problems could become more pronounced when Chinese students arrive at Western universities for the first time and are faced with learning styles and approaches that are alien to them” (Harding 1997:37).

Harding (1997) goes on to suggest that Chinese students will be challenged by critical or creative pedagogies and explains this in terms derived from the work of Hofstede (1986) as being manifestations of their national culture and as such a natural trait. The implication of this perspective is that Chinese students would face serious problems and encounter learning barriers were they to join a course that stresses creativity.

This perspective is not confined to Western authors. Ng (2001) explains in ‘*Why Asians* are less creative than Westerners*’ why it appears to be harder for Chinese students to behave in a creative manner, as compared to their Western counterparts.

* Within the title of this book the term Asian refers to all those from the Asian Pacific Region, i.e.: China, Japan, Taiwan and Korea.

His approach pursues a confrontational perspective that parallels the Ballard and Clanchy (1985) 'deficiency' assertion.

Ng (2001) suggests, harking back to Hofstede (1986) that Easterners are less creative than Westerners because of the way that each behaves in their respective cultures. Ng places great emphasis on the importance of cultural and societal influences on each individual's psychological makeup that then determines their behaviour. This in turn leads to the observed differences in creative and task-involved behaviours between what he describes as the insular/collectivistic societies of the East and the liberal/individualistic societies of the West. Ng argues that Eastern society places importance upon social order and harmony, whereas Western society is more loosely organised and individualistic. Ng states that this supports his theory that the Chinese cultural and social system is not inclined to allow individual freedom of expression, which he believes hinders personal creativity. Although he accepts that there may be exceptions to this rule, he generally believes that this explains the deficiency in Eastern individual creativity in comparison with Western artists. Ng repetitively states that all creativity is culturally determined.

“the Chinese way of raising a child emphasises the importance of filial piety and fitting in with the group, this may encourage the development of cognitive conservatism, a constellation of attributes which leads the person to adopt a passive, uncritical and uncreative orientation to learning” (Ng 2001:65).

Ng as well as the other authors, Hofstede, Ballard & Clanchy and Redding, have repeatedly employed explicit cultural categories as the central thread throughout their narratives. There was a prevailing tendency for the literature to examine and interpret specific data with reference to general ethnic classifications and to label issues via a 'cultural tag'. Such literature suggests an implicit assumption that problems and issues are cultural by nature, i.e. Chinese students have one approach to learning, whereas Western students have another, with the literature implying that both are inherently embedded within their cultural or national identities which are largely fixed and unchangeable.

Whilst these aforementioned cultural and geographical categories cover broad areas, there is also a tendency to use group descriptors where individual descriptors might be more appropriate: for example, treating all people from the East as a single grouping when separate national descriptors may be more acceptable. Cole (2004) argues that a far better solution would be if every person could be treated as an individual, instead of as a member of any grouping.

As posited by both Ryan (2005) and Gu (2009), the use of group descriptors to describe students has to be sensitively addressed or a crude picture may be painted of such students and their academic contexts. Altman (2010) argues that wherever possible the learning habits of these students needs to be researched not as being ‘culturally specific’ but as being ‘individually specific’. There is every chance that via research that does not assume cultural explanations we may find that Chinese and other international students may have more in common than not.

In summarising this ‘deficiency model’, with reference to my own study, Hofstede, Redding or Ballard and Clanchy would predict that Chinese students would encounter serious problems, following a programme which stresses creativity and individuality, due to their culturally based ‘mental programming’ that stressed conformity and harmony. These authors would also focus on the group-similarities of the participating students, negatively emphasising the dissimilarity with learning styles and conflicting pedagogic approaches associated with the West. Hence, these authors would explain the ‘problematic’ situations that these students faced by reference to their ‘culture’. Any positive attributes of the students such as their adaptability, their yearning for success and their desire to understand alternative cultures and concepts would have probably been discounted by these authors. Stereotyping and a lack of interest in individual differences on the part of such authors were some of the most notable aspects of this ‘deficiency model’.

THE ‘MISCONCEPTIONS MODEL’

Towards the end of the 1980s and into the 1990s the ‘misconceptions model’ emerged, exemplified and led by the work of Biggs and Watkins (1996) and followed by Cortazzi and Jin (1997). Together they explained that the previous ‘deficiency model’ was a misrepresentation of reality, as learning by rote was simply

the Chinese method of delving deeper into a topic, thereby allowing the understanding of the work to be more intimate, complete and facilitating an adoption of a deeper approach to learning.

Biggs and Watkins employed Hofstede's (1980) observations as a basis upon which to build their own hypothesis that there is a Chinese style of learning that inherently derives from within Chinese culture. They brought the influence of, what they termed, the Confucian Heritage Culture (CHC) to the forefront of the debate about Chinese learning methodology with a more positive cultural explanation. They argued that Chinese learners were not so very different from Western learners, with both using repetition within their learning systems; what did differ was that Chinese students used repetition far more strategically than their Western counterparts in their attempts to understand their educational environment (Watkins & Biggs 1996). However, a comparison between the learning styles of Chinese students just arrived in the UK and those of local students showed that their initially different approaches to learning had progressively coalesced into a conjoined approach within a relatively short period of time. The Chinese had gradually adjusted and integrated their methods into a common Western approach, with their newly acquired learning processes becoming highly responsive to the demands of specific learning situations, rather than determined by the inherent characteristics of a cultural grouping.

“What strikes us is not a preference for repetition, but their cue consciousness, driven by a need to perform well in whatever assessment tasks are set; they are highly motivated to do well in their set tasks, and are alert for cues that help them do so” (Watkins & Biggs 1996:273).

Much of the more positive reaction, in marked contrast to the earlier negative views relating to the impact of Chinese culture on learning, derived from the developmental work of Watkins and Biggs. Their 1996 book *The Chinese Learner* became a significant resource for teachers working with East Asian students, and has become a highly influential text for students due to the unpretentious writing style that manages to inform its readers in a persuasive manner (Kim 1998, Dineen & Collins 2005, Ryan 2007). Watkins and Biggs wrote of how the Chinese disciplined, repetitive approach to learning had previously been thought by generations of

European and American academics (typified by Redding 1990) to be inferior to the Westernised ‘understanding’ or ‘critical-thinking’ approach. They argued that rote or memorised learning was not an automaton reaction, as Ballard and Clanchy (1991) had suggested, but was a central and significant part of the student’s approach to deep learning. This view was endorsed by Cortazzi and Jin (1997) who explained that Chinese students believe that memorisation will facilitate full and proper understanding of any text, as Chinese educators make no distinction between memorisation and understanding, unlike most Western educators.

Biggs argued that when working with Chinese students it was important to assume that any persistent pedagogical difficulties did not come from the student themselves but from the teaching. “You teach better by focussing not on how students differ, not even on what you are doing, but on what your students are doing” (Biggs 1999:139).

A further distinction with regard to Chinese students arises within the area of critical thinking, which is considered to be a vital element of Western education methodology (Moore 2004, Mason 2008, Peters 2008). All students face challenges in this area, but Chinese students face a double challenge because not only must they think critically but they must also think critically in a second language (Floyd 2011).

Cortazzi and Jin (2001), echoing Biggs, contend that authors such as Redding (1990) and Atkinson (1997) had not taken into consideration that Chinese students might work with a different concept of how and when critical thinking was appropriate to their learning. Within Chinese learning culture “practice and imitation is emphasised until mastery of the basics is achieved, after which understanding and creativity emerge” (Jin & Cortazzi 2006:12). Therefore, only when the basics have been mastered, or any seminal texts have been thoroughly absorbed, do these students then believe that they are in a position to critically engage with such concepts. According to Annping (2007), it is part of the Confucian heritage to believe that total absorption and assimilation is the way to complete understanding. Similarly, Biggs (1999) argues that the wish to completely understand something indicates a deep approach to learning as opposed to a surface approach that only indicates a wish to memorise the minimum facts necessary to accomplish any chosen task. In *The Chinese Learner* (1996), multiple authors gave their perspectives of how Chinese students (and their

teachers) perceived the context and content of Chinese students' approaches to learning. The chapter by Volet and Renshaw (1996:217) using observations and recordings of the students' adaptability and continuity, deals with how Chinese students cope with Western-style education. They found that after just one academic term Chinese students' learning was "similar in nature and direction to local students, reflecting the impact of contextual influences on all students' study". These authors stated that the change in the Chinese students' approach to study demonstrated a strategic flexibility in meeting any new educational requirements, and an advantageous and wise continuity in maintaining a high academic orientation (ibid). The advantage of 'Chinese heritage' students from countries such as Singapore, Malaysia, and Hong Kong where such students were predominantly educated in the English language, enabled insights to be gained into Chinese students approaches to study without any confounding effects of language or dissimilar contextual demands.

Another contributing author, Winter (1996), remarked that peer tutoring seemed to be particularly suited to a group-oriented collectivist society such as that of the Chinese, as also described by Hofstede (1986) and Watkins & Biggs (1996).

"In collective societies, such as China, students are expected to learn 'how to do' whilst in individualist societies, such as the UK, students are expected to learn 'how to learn' ". (Hofstede 1986:313).

It has been suggested by Kirby, Woodhouse and Ma (1996) that the use of memorisation strategies by Chinese students may be partly a result of language difficulties, rather than of culture. The use of such a strategy arises from the relative difficulty of working within a second language (L2), with less fluent L2 students being more likely to adopt these strategies (ibid). Indeed, most complex cognitive functions appear to be negatively affected by operating in a second language. Cook (1993) argues that any research finding below par performance by L2 users must be considered in light of "the general phenomenon of second language cognitive deficit" (Cook 1993:111). Research suggests that lack of L2 proficiency reduces the ability to use higher order strategies such as discourse processing (Koda 2005) and to employ deep-learning processes (Kirby, Woodhouse & Ma 1996). Since students

studying in a second language struggle to perform at the same level as they are capable of in their first language, such students' difficulties in creative thinking must be, at least partly, attributable to language difficulties.

Watkins and Biggs (1996) state that cross-cultural differences in the processes of teaching and learning, particularly with respect to the role of memorisation and to the nature of motivation, appear to resolve what they describe as 'the Paradox of the Chinese Learner'. This paradox is that traditionally taught Chinese students regularly outperform more contemporarily taught Western students on measures of achievement such as IEA and TIMSS*. Perhaps more importantly though Watkins and Biggs (1996) also illustrate that the misconceptions and stereotyping by Western observers are frequently found to be without foundation. However, the specific title of Watkins and Biggs book '*The Chinese learner: Cultural, psychological and contextual influences*' (1996), with the prefix '*The*' suggesting that there is only one type of Chinese Learner, demonstrates the very stereotyping that these authors were warning against. It not only implies that Chinese students are homogeneous, but also that their educational approaches are primarily culturally determined. Generally though, this model takes a far more positive view than any of its predecessors, but shares a focus on culture to explain students' approaches to studying; however, unlike its predecessors, it recognises the capacity of students to change their approaches when faced with new learning environments.

Cortazzi & Jin (2001) and Shi (2006) extended the argument about the so-called 'homogenised' Chinese students (i.e.: that they are all standardised, all the same) by explaining that those who supported this proposition were not only oversimplifying the situation but in some cases were actually impeding a solution. Shi opines that when teachers and authors speak or write of such homogeneities in relation to China:

“They should not oversimplify the picture. It is worth noting that such homogeneities are rather misleading. When we consider ‘Chinese students’, we should consider the variety of their national, regional,

* *IEA = International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement.*
TIMSS = Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study.

economic, class and cultural backgrounds as well as age, religion and gender” (Shi 2006:139).

Moreover, Cortazzi and Jin (2010) state that when research upon Chinese students is conducted, authors need to be aware of the specific historical antecedents and social context that is such a ‘moving target’ in China nowadays (ibid). When dealing with human beings and social situations things are never simple or straightforward. Difficulties in critical thinking in a Chinese student may be seen as cultural, while similar difficulties in UK students may be regarded individually. Similarly, Clark and Gieve (2006:63) argued against ascribing a “fixed, reified, homogenous” identity to Chinese learners and urged faculty to “understand, interpret and represent the actual learners” (ibid) within their personal and individual educational contexts.

Additional problems may arise for Chinese students from the style or approach adopted by their teachers. In terms of support from faculty, Goodwin and Nacht (1983) report that three main factors appear to create tension and sometimes even hostility between staff and Chinese students: First, the faculty’s ‘fear of the unknown’; second, their unwillingness to commit the necessary time to teach the more ‘challenging’ students (according to the faculty); and lastly the perceived passivity of Chinese students within the classroom setting (Goodwin and Nacht 1983). These are compounded by the perceived deficiency of Chinese students in critical thinking (Turner 2006). Such perceptions, however, may themselves be culturally grounded, for when evaluating such skills it is important to be aware that cultural stereotypes do influence one’s own perceptions (Clark & Gieve 2006). A further concern raised by McClure (2007) is the constant administrative pressure placed upon faculty members to accept increasingly greater numbers of international students, which could be a factor that causes misdirected resentment amongst some teaching staff towards international students.

In summarising this ‘misconceptions model’, Biggs and Watkins, although far more positive towards Chinese student contributions than the previous ‘deficiency model’ of Redding or Ballard and Clanchy, continued to place great emphasis upon cultural explanations. They also had a tendency to categorise Chinese students as a homogenous grouping, rather than treating them as individuals with distinct characteristics. Within my own thesis, Biggs and Watkins, because of their focus on

culture to explain ‘the Chinese approach to studying’, would have responded to my research questions by predicting that Chinese students would encounter numerous difficulties adjusting to teaching and learning styles which stressed creativity from the outset and which placed no value on rote learning. Although rather stereotypical with regard to Chinese students’ engagement in learning and approaches to learning, by treating them as an homogenous group, Biggs and Watkins would stress the capacity of Chinese students to change their approach when faced with a new environment.

THE ‘REPOSITIONING MODEL’

Around early 2000, Chinese scholars such as Qing Gu (2004) and Rui Xu (2004) began to ‘reposition’ the debate as to the nature of Chinese students’ approach to teaching and learning. They argued that Chinese education was changing rapidly, and whilst these changes were by no means consistent across the entire Chinese educational system, it was evident that the foremost Chinese universities (i.e.: Beihang/Beijing Universities) were becoming, in terms of pedagogy, comparable with their Western counterparts, at least within specific subject areas (UNESCO UIS 2010).

Gu also argues that Westerners have misinterpreted the Chinese situation and that contextual and sociocultural factors have been as important as cultural matters in influencing students’ adjustment and achievement within Higher Education in the UK.

“The belief gaps across and within cultures observed in this study both emphasise sociocultural and contextual factors underlying language teaching and learning. The main disparity lies in the awareness and extent to which ELT* professionals realise and perceive the influence of contextual and personal factors on language teaching practices” (Gu 2004:228).

Both Gu and Xu argued that previous educational writers have misjudged both the Chinese student and their methods of learning, but with more Chinese writers now coming to the fore, this should be less of a problem. One such writer, Chan (1999),

* = *English Language Teaching*

influenced both Gu and Xu by arguing that the views of Westerners such as Biggs and Watkins were an over-simplification of the Chinese/Confucian principles and that such views were rapidly becoming out-dated. Chan (1999:296) similarly explains how “Chinese culture and students have been misunderstood by Western academics for many years” as typified by the writings of both Ballard & Clanchy (1985) and Redding (1990). He continues by explaining that it is only recently that some Western academics (such as Cortazzi & Jin 1997) are starting to comprehend the real importance of Chinese and Confucian educational philosophy and realising the significant and positive part that they could play in the process of teaching and learning within the internationalisation of education.

Intercultural adjustment is not linear or passive (Gu, Schweisfurth & Day 2010) and students are “constantly aware of and mediating between identities, values and cultural practices in their new university contexts, as compared to their home academic institutions” (Robinson-Pant, Sayed & Morris 2010:1). All of which can leave the students vulnerable, both individually and together, leading to insecurity and lack of self-belief in both academic and social situations.

Gu and Schweisfurth (2009) also remind us that when dealing with sociocultural matters the attitudes of the teachers are as important as those of the students. They write, “it is important for educationalists to have an analytical and reflexive attitude when working across cultural borders” (ibid 2009:75). Gu and Schweisfurth believe this to be of great importance, when repositioning to a more contemporary model, so that all teachers and researchers may thereby avoid ethnocentric conclusions about their students, based upon the teachers’ own personal values and sociocultural assumptions. Additionally, when writing from a cross-cultural perspective, they remark that it is important to realise that “a teaching or learning approach that is taken for granted and regarded as universal and common sense by people from one culture may be seen as idiosyncratic and ineffective in the eyes of people from a different culture” (2009:75). For as Gu, Schweisfurth and Day (2009) argue, teachers often work with stereotypes of their students and not actually with the students themselves. Thus, an appreciation of the effect of such thinking establishes a baseline from which teachers can begin to interact in a more appropriate manner within their

multicultural classes. Prejudice within an educational setting, as within any other setting, is unavoidable. As Usher explains:

“Research involves interpreting the actions of those who are themselves interpreters: it involves interpretations of interpretations – the double hermeneutic at work. Understanding an object is always ‘prejudiced’ in the sense that it can only be approached through an initial projection of meaning. This initial projection is from the subject’s situatedness, from the subject’s standpoint in history, society and culture” (Usher 1996:20).

The problem of cultural prejudice has also been written about by Scott (1996). He wrote of how teachers and education are ‘value laden’ and how it is problematic for teachers, who are themselves products of an educational tradition, to take a “value-neutral or value-free position” (1996:155). This is why Scott believes it is of great importance that teachers and researchers adopt a deeply reflective attitude towards their personal ethnocentric values (Scott 1996). It requires teachers to reflect upon their own “social stock of knowledge” (Berger & Luckmann 1996:56) and internally scrutinise their previously taken-for-granted attitudes about all things of a cultural nature. Berger & Luckmann state that it is specifically because reality is subjective that teachers need to be so aware of their educational situation at all times while maintaining sensitivity towards both their students’ requirements and their circumstances (Berger & Luckmann 1996).

A further study by Gu, Schweisfurth and Day (2010) argues that a self-reflecting approach will help educational researchers to be alert to the development of their own professional positions and perspectives and consequently be sensitive to matters of an educational or cultural context of both their own and others’ making. Murphy-Lejeune (2003) when discussing the cultural values of students and teachers wrote:

“Intercultural experience involves at first disorientation and loss, a confrontation with a foreign environment which may violently jolt individuals and perturb their taken-for-granted world. It places individuals in a situation where adaptation and transformations are

necessary if they are to maximise life in their new conditions” (Murphy-Lejeune 2003:101).

Transformational change at the deepest level is both psychologically demanding and intensely personal, and need not always have a positive outcome. For as Roberts (2003:124) writes: “It involves the whole social being struggling to make sense of him or herself as she or he tries to make sense of others”. In 1998, while studying ‘transformation through contact’, Coleman’s research on students undergoing extended residence abroad indicated that not only had some students previous stereotypes been reinforced but that up to a third of the students’ had developed even more negative stereotypes of ‘others’ than previously. As one student explained:

“I have had to accept many things I do not approve of and it is such a shock to me because of my own customs. It is as though everything I have been taught at home and all my values do not count for anything here and I must become a different person to cope with it all” (Anonymous student quoted in Harris 1995:79).

These findings are not that surprising when you appreciate that any human interaction is fraught with uncertainty, and although we must strive for positive outcomes, there is an equal chance that such outcomes may ultimately be negative. Cortazzi and Jin, writing in 1997, explained how problems may arise if any host UK university expects visiting international students to merely integrate into British life automatically:

“Learning across cultures means considering overseas students as bearers of cultures. Since cultures carry with them principles and systems of interpretation, the potential solution of simply asking overseas students to assimilate to British ways is unlikely to be successful since these aspects of culture are deep-rooted and change may be seen as a threat to identity” (Cortazzi & Jin 1997:88).

This model focussed on the changing approaches of Chinese students and the fact that they were never static or fixed in their attitudes. A further important aspect of

this model is how its focus is not just upon the students but also upon the actions of the teachers and the processes of the teaching itself.

In summarising this ‘repositioning model’, the fact that authors such as Xu, Gu and Schweisfurth were taking an increasingly inclusive approach to Chinese students was especially notable. They assumed that Chinese/Confucian educational philosophy could play an important and positive part in the process of teaching and learning within the internationalisation of education and that is a position with which I have some agreement. However, with reference to how this model would address my study, I wonder if Schweisfurth’s concentration upon culture as the focus of the problem would lead her to question my findings. Similarly, her focus on the need for ‘self-reflecting’ teaching staff is admirable, however, I also believe that the more mundane day to day difficulties that the students face need greater recognition if we are to bring about a resolution to such student problems.

THE ‘INDIVIDUALITY MODEL’

More recently, in the 2010s, the ‘individuality model’ came to the fore. This model is exemplified by the work of Ryan and Radclyffe-Thomas, and is a counter to the first two of the models mentioned above, but particularly to Redding’s ‘deficiency model’. It is outwardly similar, and overlaps significantly with, the ‘repositioning model’ but with its central theme focussed more strongly upon the individual as opposed to the collective.

Ryan (2010) emphasises the individuality of the student and argues that Biggs and Watkins (writing in the 1990s, which followed but contradicted Redding’s 1980 position) exaggerated the cultural explanation and overstated the influence that Confucianism played upon Chinese students education. According to Ryan, the views of neither Redding nor Biggs and Watkins were helpful in providing satisfactory explanations of how the average Chinese student learnt, since they did not adequately take into account the dynamics of individuality or ‘cultural adaptability’. Ryan (2010) alludes to, but does not specifically articulate, the possibility of the existence of a distinctly Chinese approach to learning styles where

an individual may exhibit tendencies towards one set of learning characteristics rather than another, but never to the exclusion of other modes.

Ryan advocates the necessity for a detailed examination of what she describes as the ‘continuing Western stereotyped deficit attitudes’ towards Chinese students (Ryan 2010). She writes of how these attitudes possess an enduring influence that persists even though there have been misgivings about them for many years. She persuasively argues for a detailed examination of these stereotypes by assessing Chinese students cultural backgrounds and educational experiences thereby uncovering their impact upon student behaviour and the sense of isolation or loss of identity within foreign educational environments. Ryan contends that there is no single type of Chinese learner, as implied by Watkins and Biggs in 1996, and that the concept itself is problematic, as Chinese students should not be assessed on the basis of a national grouping, but as separate and distinct individuals. Ryan’s assertion of the individuality of every student is dominant throughout her writing and her sense of injustice concerning the ‘othering’ of Chinese students is an important factor within this model.

On the basis of her research, Ryan (2005) argues that Chinese students are not so different from other international students and that their major problems when studying abroad usually relate to language issues and social circumstances, and not to educational or pedagogical matters. In fact, some earlier research (Cortazzi & Jin 1996, Entwistle 1998) had shown that rather than the inherent cultural characteristics of international students being the main influence upon their learning approach within their host country, it is the teaching and learning approaches and environments combined with the nature of the curriculum that can be the major factor in this process. Ryan (2011) echoes Gu and Schweisfurth when she writes of the inevitable institutional changes and adjustments that universities and teachers need to make if they are to be responsive to the needs, interests, expectations and aspirations of international students; particularly if these students are to feel welcome and not be seen as mere cash cows relieving the growing financial requirements of Western institutions. Ryan (*ibid*) highlights the current lack of understanding concerning the requirements of international students and focuses on the responsibility of educational institutions to adjust their policies and practices to suit

the requirements of visiting students rather than expecting those same students to fit into the structures that already exist (Stiasny & Gore 2012).

Ryan (2010) asserts that in the past western authors such as Watkins and Biggs have overstated the influence that Confucian Heritage Culture (CHC) has played upon Chinese students' learning (Ryan & Slethaug 2010), both before and after arriving in the UK. Ryan acknowledges the part that Biggs played in "debunking the deficit model" (2007:410) of writers such as Redding or Ballard and Clanchy, but strikes a note of caution in that we must not go to the other extreme and hail a once maligned educational system as a new source of pedagogic salvation (Ryan & Louie 2007). Rather, Ryan argues, we need to understand and appreciate the basic fact that Chinese students are not so different from other international students in that their number one difficulty is usually the need for clear, unambiguous communication. Such miscommunication is primarily language-based but can also be due to societal misunderstandings, and "teachers need to become anthropologists of their own culture in order to understand how the normative assumptions underpinning their pedagogical practices can be problematic for international students or, indeed, for other groups of students" (Ryan 2000:414). Her writing provides a timely reminder of the dangers of cultural/ethnic stereotyping, the associated binary logic and the failure to contextualise the learning process. Whilst there is a good deal of interest in understanding what characterises the Chinese learner, Ryan warns of the dangers of over-generalisation with regard to Chinese culture, and Chinese learning in particular. She provides useful insights into the experiences and related issues of international students in Western institutions. Her suggestions provide an insight for all who teach in the increasingly racially and ethnically diverse establishments of higher learning, particularly those in Western countries.

Another author with a similar approach, but writing in an earlier time period, is Entwistle who was a leading advocate of the 'student centring-approach' whereby a greater emphasis was given to placing students at the centre of the learning process as opposed to just adding them into an already existing teaching and learning environment. However, such a 'centring-approach' could become a special challenge for Chinese students if they were previously exposed to more conventional academic programmes of instruction that depended upon more traditional pedagogical

methodologies. Entwistle (1998) argued that international students' learning depended on a complex web of influences drawn from the features of the complete teaching and learning environment. He stated that this was made more complex by the disparity of differing disciplines, numerous organisational boundaries and the divergent international student intakes in higher education. All this suggested to him that there were bound to be systematic differences, regardless of natural culture, in what could be the most effective teaching-learning environment across varying disciplines, differing subject areas* and multiple institutional contexts throughout higher education (Entwistle 1998).

Much of the research literature into teaching and learning in higher education has tried to establish universal descriptions of teaching and learning environments that will help international students to learn more successfully. Hounsell and Entwistle (2005) proposed that differences in subjects/disciplines, departmental environments and institutional circumstances must all be taken into account. They stress that the balance of these 'issues' to student characteristics is vital; thus learning outcomes are dependent upon the complicated interplay between staff and students within the specific circumstance formed by subject/discipline and institution (Entwistle & Tait 1990, Hounsell & Entwistle 2005). This suggests that international students' experiences within the UK cannot be solely analysed as a manifestation of differences in national or cultural characteristics. The nature of the subject/discipline, the institutional context, the classroom dynamic as well as the student's individual experiences and background are all components of one whole.

Entwistle, McCune and Walker, writing in 2001, argued that the relationship between students' identities and their learning should give more weight and validity to the experiences of individual learners. Entwistle suggested this as a partial

* *The term Art and Design encompasses many specialist sub-disciplines (e.g. Animation, Fine Art, Graphic Design etc.) and these are reflected in the range of specialisms the students studied (See Figure 5, page 72). Whilst these different specialities might provide the students with different experiences they shared the Institutions ethos and pedagogy which focussed on encouraging creativity and originality. Accordingly this study did not explore the differences across the sub-disciplines and the interviews did not suggest that those differences were seen as relevant by the students.*

response to the tendency of most other perspectives that placed the blame for any 'problematic' situation upon the student.

Both Ryan and Entwistle insist that the diversity and complex characteristics of individual Chinese students be recognised, and that rather than the students having to adapt to suit the needs of the university, the opposite should be the case, with the same also holding true with regard to assessment procedures. Ryan and Entwistle's writing echoes previous comments by Ramsden (1997) who argued the importance of a students' sense of who they are and of their sense of belonging, or not, to a particular academic community.

"The academic communities within which students are engaging will each to some extent possess their own norms, values, discourses and practices" (Ramsden 1997:203).

Huntley (1993) argues that all international students, no matter their country of origin, age or gender, will experience problems adjusting to their new surroundings when they become a visiting student in a foreign land. An open, positive and flexible mindset is a vital factor in the students' adjustment to a new educational and social environment (Andrade 2006). Research has shown that, apart from intrinsic support structures, the biggest influence upon 'culture shock' is the students' own individual personality (McClure 2007, Zhang & Kenny 2010). Andrade (2006) suggests that age is the largest barrier to adjustment, that women suffer more adjustment problems than men (*ibid*), and that those who come from the most dissimilar cultural and academic environments are the most likely to have difficulty adapting to the culture of the UK and its educational system (Lijuan 2002, McClure 2007).

Chinese students in particular, writes Huntley (1993), find adjusting to Western classroom situations to be especially difficult where any kind of oral presentation, or merely being asked to respond to a simple question, can lead to enormous stress and anxiety. Chinese students' adjustment to their new educational and social situations can be a dynamic and complicated process. In an ethnographic study of international postgraduate exchange students at a UK university, Brown and Holloway (2008) found a relationship between the passage of time and a gradual decrease in what they term 'acculturative stress'. However, this was not a generalisable process; there were

differences not only in experiences throughout the student body but also in the individuals' subjective sense of accomplishment across unrelated features of their lives within their new situations.

An additional item of significance identified by Maringe and Carter (2007) was that the discipline in which Chinese students were participating was of great consequence with regard to the probability of their success within Western universities. They found that such students' success rates were considerably higher in the fact-based disciplines of engineering, mathematics, science and accountancy (*ibid*), whereas in the disciplines more dependent upon language skills and shared communication, such as the social sciences, Chinese students had their lowest levels of academic performance (*ibid*). Maringe and Carter's (2007) findings also correlate to the language needs of visiting postgraduate students, where complex, meticulous explanatory verbal communication is necessary for all of the social sciences (Goldkuhl 2003). Therefore, it is not surprising that the disciplines of engineering, science and technology are the study areas chosen by the majority of Chinese students (Huntley 1993), which tends to suggest that these students may be strategically selecting courses that enhance their possibilities for success.

A sub-division within similar research of such students' success rates additionally showed that younger Chinese students adjustment problems were less, compared to that of older students (Solomon & Young 1987). It also showed that older students' lack of recent academic exposure was believed to have been the main cause of their problems (Solomon & Young 1987, Huntley 1993). The argument that is advanced by Ryan (2005 & 2010) about the need for systemic changes in today's educational institutions is of particular importance to her. She writes of the need for administrators and teachers to recognise and accommodate the cultural, social, linguistic, familial and aspirational capital that the growing numbers of international students bring not just to our universities, but also to the learning process itself.

With reference to the "2010s individuality model" and Chinese students in UK creative courses, Ryan envisages that a detailed examination of their didactic experiences and their associated cultural backgrounds would uncover a greater understanding of their "behaviour, sense of isolation or loss of identity within such

foreign educational environments” (Ryan 2005). Ryan also predicts, based upon her own research (Ryan 2010) that although there may be a host of minor factors negatively influencing visiting Chinese students, the major factor (besides language) will be of a personal and individual nature and not culturally collective as suggested in the earlier models of Ballard & Clanchy (1980s) and Biggs and Watkins (1990s).

Reviewing comparable works to my own

The previous pages have portrayed the varied aspects of the literature on Chinese students from wide-ranging sources. I now focus on four authors’ works that are most closely comparable to my own study. The authors in question are: Qing Gu, Rui Xu, Janette Ryan and Natascha Radclyffe-Thomas.

If we were to align the works of these four authors to the ‘developmental models’ previously mentioned, they would align as follows: Qing Gu and Rui Xu would be located within the ‘repositioning model’, while Janette Ryan and Natascha Radclyffe-Thomas would be situated in the ‘individuality model’.

The first of these authors, Qing Gu, has written many fine works but I will concentrate on three articles that are directly applicable to the area of research in this study. The earliest of these works was entitled ‘*Who adapts? Beyond Cultural Models of the Chinese Learner*’ and was published in 2006, co-written with Michele Schweisfurth. This was followed by ‘*Changing Places: A Study of Chinese Students in the UK*’, co-written with Alan Maley in 2008; and the third article, written in 2009, was entitled ‘*Maturity and Interculturality: Chinese Students’ Experiences in UK Higher Education*’. All three of these works relate to characteristics of Chinese students and the nature of the students’ intercultural experiences within higher education and are therefore of great significance for this review.

The second author is Rui Xu. The study in question was an offshoot of the Entwistle and Hounsell ‘*Enhancing Teaching-Learning Project*’ (ETL Project) of 2001-2005. Xu produced a subsidiary study from the Entwistle and Hounsell project and then by reworking two ETL questionnaires, the ‘*Enhancing Teaching-Learning Questionnaire*’ (ETLQ 2001) and the ‘*Learning and Studying Questionnaire*’ (LSQ 2001) she produced a third questionnaire (CETLQ 2004) for use within her own

study. By her adaptation of these two previous questionnaires Xu focused her study on to Chinese undergraduate economics students in Chinese mainland universities. This study was then entitled '*Chinese Mainland Students' Experiences of Teaching and Learning at a Chinese University*'. The accompanying '*Chinese students' Experiences of Teaching and Learning Questionnaire*' (CETLQ 2004) obtained highly specific and comprehensive data on Chinese students' experiences of teaching and learning, but it was written, directed and targeted at undergraduate economics students within Mainland China.

Janette Ryan is the third relevant author. The first of her three works that was of specific interest to this review was '*A Guide to Teaching International Students*' (2000). This was written for mainstream university teaching staff wishing to improve their teaching skills with regard to international students. It was of importance for the significance that it placed upon valuing diversity and being appreciative of the individuality of each student compared to the collective cultural grouping that was previously the norm. The second significant piece by Ryan '*False Dichotomy? Western and Confucian Concepts of Scholarship and Learning*' (2007) was co-authored with Kam Louie. This article had a considerable impact upon the field of Chinese student affairs as it called into question the previously held paradigm of Biggs and Watkins who had written in the 1990s of the positive collectivist influences of the Chinese Confucian heritage upon the pedagogy of the Greater China Region. Ryan's third written work was a joint venture with Slethaug entitled '*International Education and the Chinese Learner*' (2010). This edited book of ten case studies covers multiple aspects of the 'Chinese learner' within an international education context, and is one of the first full-length studies in the rapidly developing field of transnational pedagogy. The work by Ryan and Slethaug puts the notion of a single kind of Chinese learner to the test as the text explores 'cultures of learning, institutional contexts and ethnic and national diversity'.

The fourth and final author was Radclyffe-Thomas, and her study '*Intercultural Chameleons or the Chinese Way? Chinese Students in Western Art and Design Education*' (2007) is particularly pertinent in that it explicitly deals with the experiences of Chinese students in the creative disciplines of art and design within a UK institution. Radclyffe-Thomas (ibid) wrote not just generally about the

experiences of Chinese students but also in great detail of their creativity, intercultural communication, learning culture, stereotypes and art and design education, and all within the context of a UK university. The direct relevance of the Radclyffe-Thomas article to my own area of research explains the rationale for its inclusion within this review.

QING GU

All three of my chosen works by Qing Gu have the same central premise, which is to investigate the cross-cultural experiences of Chinese students within a UK context. Gu claims that her own intercultural experiences and complementary perception, obtained through her academic studies in the UK, allowed her to access the ‘other’ perspective thereby exploring comparisons from both sides and permitting a contrasting understanding of either standpoint.

The first work of interest is her 2006 article that was a mixed methods research study that explored Chinese learners intercultural experiences in both Chinese and UK educational contexts. The initial part of this study entailed questionnaires and semi-structured qualitative interviews with rural Chinese students who had recently arrived in major urban universities within China. Subsequently, the focus switched to the UK where equivalent questionnaires and interviews were undertaken in English universities that probed the challenges that new Chinese students faced in adapting to studying in the UK. The comparability of the two sets of respondents came from their shared roles and mutual experiences as they both endeavoured to learn and develop within unfamiliar environments. When comparing the perspectives of these two sets of Chinese learners, from two contrasting contexts, the authors found that in addition to culture, issues such as individualism and incentives of the learners and the ‘position of authority’ relative to them and their tutors were important features in the developments made by both sets of these Chinese students.

“Factors other than culture alone also influence the adaptation that takes place as part of the learning process. Factors such as the professional identities and motivations of the teachers and learners, the context where teaching and learning take place, and the power relationships between

them are shown to be significant issues in the strategic adaptations made by Chinese learners” (Gu & Schweisfurth 2006:74).

One of the most notable differences between the two sample groups, from China and the UK, was the cross-cultural interaction aspect, whereby the rural students within the original study in China felt isolated within their own grouping. Even though all the participants were Chinese, they were from many disparate regions of China, an extremely large country with many varied dialects and diverse customs. This left many of the students with a sense of isolation even within the extended grouping of their fellow compatriots. In contrast when the focus of the research changed to the Chinese students in UK universities there were no reports of isolation from within this Chinese student community. Although these students were again from similarly disparate backgrounds within China they immediately bonded into one single social grouping, thereby allowing a common sense of security to be formed against any perceived external ‘differences’.

The social isolationism felt by the students within the original study in China was relatively short-lived, as gradually the students became more comfortable in their new surroundings, slowly adopted, and adapted to, their new educational and social situation. It is therefore apparent from this study that the students in two markedly different contexts (China and the UK) all had remarkable motivation and willingness to adjust and that “intercultural encounters were potentially positive experiences in that they provide an opportunity for critical self-reflection and self-awareness, strategic adaptation and consequently professional and personal growth” (Gu & Schweisfurth 2006:87).

This leads to the second article (Gu 2008), which investigated how Chinese students, within higher education, adjust to their new academic and social environments within UK universities. The study used both quantitative questionnaires and qualitative interviews that emphasised an inter-cultural, or mutually reciprocated position rather than a cross-cultural, or an overarching one. An important element of their questionnaire was the examination of both academic and social circumstances that enabled a comprehensive and balanced evaluation to be taken of the Chinese students totality of circumstances within their UK environment. The authors’ interpretative

findings allocate a considerable amount of space to the social and supportive situations for these visiting Chinese students, and this is notable, as it is not unusual for such studies to concentrate upon the academic dimension whilst overlooking the social and interpersonal aspects. They support the significant part that personal relationships and support networks play for international students and state that these can often mean the difference between a successful graduating student and one who returns home early (Gu & Maley 2008). The authors expanded upon the personal circumstances of cross-cultural acclimatisation when they observed that visiting Chinese students' primary acclimatisation difficulties were not of the academic variety but more of the social kind. They found that the circumstances of visiting Chinese students who live an entirely different 'life pattern' could lead to a very lonely existence, with feelings of alienation and a "sense of loss of the familiar" (Gu & Maley 2008:232). As a student explained:

"When I first arrived here I was on my own. My husband and my daughter were both in China. I felt very, very lonely. Once I was seriously ill. I think it might be because I was not used to the life here".

Chinese postgraduate student 'I' (cited in Gu & Maley 2008:232).

In their 2008 work, Gu and Maley found that personal, pedagogical and psychological factors were all equally important in influencing the intercultural acclimatisation process and outcomes. Their findings also showed that "despite various intercultural challenges and struggles, most students managed to survive the demands of the learning and living environment, and to adapt and develop" (Gu & Maley 2008:224). Gu stated that the purpose of her third article was "to offer pedagogical implications including the need for increased awareness amongst the faculty of the different phases of change and development that Chinese students experience in their adaptation and adjustment to a foreign living and studying environment" (Gu 2009:38). The article explored Chinese students' intercultural experiences based upon the authors' three earlier studies. All of these studies assumed a 'bottom-to-top' methodology that investigated the development of the internationalisation of higher education at the level of individual students.

Qualitative interview narratives and quantitative questionnaire survey data were collected at both undergraduate and postgraduate level for all three of these investigations. Although all of the research samples were of a relatively small size, with the quantitative data being particularly small (the smallest of all), some indicative patterns did emerge. The findings revealed that any change process with regard to the students was affected by “inter-related personal, cultural, social, psychological and contextual factors” (Gu 2009:41). Although this may seem a rather all-encompassing statement to make, these patterns do actually complement the conclusions from her previous studies and as such reinforce her overall findings.

The article continues by identifying a combination of key findings that show unique patterns that suggest that international students’ intercultural acclimatisation “takes on the shape of a personal expansion” (Murphy-Lejeune 2003:113 cited in Gu 2009:48). They argue that the motivation and intrinsic worth that students require to accomplish such “personal expansion” (ibid) surpasses the limitations of cultural models. The findings suggest that it is the relationship of these students with their specific academic and social circumstances that facilitates such direct change that carries with it lifelong significance.

Consequently, contrary to the two models above (‘deficiency’ and ‘misconceptions’) the main premise of Gu’s work is that issues other than culture alone affect the adaptation and adjustment that takes place as part of the learning process for Chinese students. These issues include the incentives and identities of students and staff, power relationships between them and the context of the place of learning. A further significant aspect of her work was that both academic and social situations were scrutinised equally, thereby enabling a comprehensive position to be taken of the Chinese students overall situations within their UK surroundings. This led her to claim that the visiting Chinese students’ principal acclimatisation difficulties were not academic, but in fact social.

“In both surveys close to half of the respondents (49% and 48%) indicated that they were unhappy with their social life. In addition, almost a third (approx. 32% in both surveys) reported that they often felt lonely while studying in the UK” (Gu, Schweisfurth & Day 2009 2009:11).

Despite all of the difficulties that were encountered, the majority of students persevered, with most succeeding, to varying degrees, in overcoming the complex challenges that confronted them.

RUI XU

The second author is Rui Xu, who pursued a parallel project that specifically researched Chinese student experiences of teaching and learning within Mainland Chinese universities. This project was derived (with full agreement) from Entwistle and Hounsell's ETL project, and the paper that was subsequently presented by Xu at the BERA 2004 Conference discussed the emerging findings of her project. This paper, and subsequent data obtained from student's degree-level courses, contributed to Xu's 2006 PhD thesis, which was designed to explore ways of strengthening the teaching-learning environments experienced by such students. This project produced the CETLQ questionnaire of 2004, which was designed for use in Mainland Chinese contexts, specifically in undergraduate Economics degree programmes. Developed as a research instrument, its construct reliability and validity had been examined and confirmed by the data collected from more than 600 Mainland Chinese Economics students.

The questionnaire consists of three main sections: the first contains measures of students' orientations to education, the second explores students' approaches to learning and studying and the final section is designed to describe aspects of students' perceptions of their teaching-learning environment in a particular course unit or module.

The CETLQ study was designed to obtain findings that would inform teaching practices that were more effective for Chinese students, thereby addressing the needs of the ever-increasing international Chinese student population. Xu's findings indicated that Chinese students adoption of deep learning strategies were "activated by a head of mixed motivational steam: personal ambition, family face, peer support, material reward, and, yes, possibly even interest" (Xu 2004:14).

In summary, Xu's analysis of Chinese students matched the findings from other literature (e.g. McCune 2002, Entwistle 2003) that stressed the importance of the

adoption of deep learning strategies within such education systems. Xu found via her interview data that Chinese students attributed academic success primarily to their effort rather than to both effort and ability, which when linked to her previous findings seemed to suggest a dual approach to education by these Chinese students. One approach places emphasis on the intrinsic significance of education, where the fundamental value lies in pursuing human perfection; while the other approach places emphasis on the utility of education, in a similar way to Confucian philosophy that advocates a dual connection between a person's internal talents and external performance (Xu 2004). With reference to the Chinese students "adoption of deep learning strategies" that Xu (2004) uncovered through her CETLQ study, this in effect links back to the 'misconceptions model' cited at the beginning of this chapter. In their book *The Chinese Learner* Biggs & Watkins (1996) write in detail of Chinese students learning theories, including 'deep learning strategies'. So, although Xu argues that Biggs & Watkins are mistaken when they state that the style of Chinese learning originates from within Chinese culture, it is accepted by Xu that it does play a defining role in the overall entirety that is education in China. Unlike the 'misconceptions model' above, the first of the four developmental models 'the deficiency model' (exemplified by Ballard & Clancy and Redding) cannot be linked to Xu in any manner, because the central premise of 'the deficiency model' is totally at odds with Xu's research findings and indeed at odds with her total belief system in general.

JANETTE RYAN

The third author within my selected quartet was Janette Ryan, whose work on international students is of importance because it discusses the large increase in their numbers within Western universities in recent years, and the associated challenges and opportunities that Ryan believes have been neglected by those educational institutions throughout this period.

"Universities need to respond to the needs of international students by opening not just their doors to them, but once in, making sure that the curriculum is also accessible. International students are too often seen as a 'problem' that needs 'solving' . . . Instead of expecting all students to

fit in to pre-existing structures, universities need to change the way that they respond to diverse student populations” (Ryan 2000:5).

With globalisation, the steep rise in the recruitment of large numbers of international students, and the government policy of ‘widening participation’, this book could not be more pertinent. The writer consistently works to shed light upon a widespread lack of understanding and capability in this area. She contends that UK educational establishments have a responsibility to adapt to all the different needs of international students, rather than trying to make them fit into an already existing structure, and that UK assessment needs to accommodate different ways of learning, thereby allowing for international students previous pedagogical experiences.

Ryan writes of not only the cultural biases of the students but asks whether teaching staff are aware of their own cultural biases. Ryan echoes Berger and Luckmann (1996) when she states that it is an unpalatable reality that we all carry within us an inbuilt partiality that has grown and developed from an early age to the present moment, with the possibility of such bias possibly negatively influencing our relationships with people from other cultures.

“We are continuously being constructed by our culture as part of an invisible process that goes on throughout our lives. Our cultural beliefs and practices seem so natural and familiar to us that when others exhibit culturally unexpected behaviours or beliefs, we can find these behaviours very confronting, or difficult to understand, and make negative judgements about them” (Ryan 2000:6).

Ryan argues that our views of international students say more about our own cultural assumptions than about them. The diversity and individuality of each and every student, even within their own national and cultural grouping, has been the clarion call of Ryan from her earliest academic writing up to the present day. She maintains that international students bring many benefits to higher education institutions within the host countries, as they not only enrich the intellectual and cultural environment of the university but also the surrounding locality. Furthermore, as ‘living resources’

they benefit the home students intercultural skills, their sensitivity and their overall knowledge of the outside world.

Ryan continuously stresses the necessity to make it clear to international students through words and actions that the students own cultural values and traditions are not being challenged or derided and that their previous pedagogical background may be different but is not of any lesser importance than the present one. Such students need to be shown that their 'behaviour' is respected and never considered of any lesser value since aspects of an individual's cultural individuality are deep-rooted and any perceived attack upon them may be seen as a threat to the student's personal identity.

“Universities need to take a new stance that arises from mutual dialogue and respect amongst academic cultures and knowledge traditions and results in new learning, knowledge and practices. Universities need to not just engage in rhetoric about internationalisation but also to listen to others' views of internationalisation; they need to not just be institutions of learning but learning institutions” (Ryan 2011:635).

In her 2007 work, Ryan discusses the misleading dichotomy between Western and Eastern scholarship. She states that the accompanying discourse (Redding 1990, Ballard & Clanchy 1991, Marton, Dall'Alba & Kun 1996, Watkins & Biggs 1996) often ascribes the differing philosophies and paradigms in “binary terms, such as deep/surface, adversarial/harmonious, and independent/dependent” (Ryan & Louie 2007:404). Such terminology, she argues, does not take account of diversity and complexity within and between such educational systems and thereby permits a wedge to be driven between the two. This forces them into positions of opposite polarities where critical thinking and deep learning are attributed by the 'dichotomy theorists' to Western education, while plagiarism and uncritical thinking are attributed to Eastern education. More traditional commentators such as Ballard and Clanchy (1991) who have long supported positions of Western educational 'dominance' are questioned by many authors, including Ryan, and it is unlikely that any new educational texts would now adopt such prejudicial perspectives; but texts containing more subtle elements of the same are still to be found. For example, Ryan asserts that the use of the term 'paradox' within the title *The Paradox of the Chinese*

Learner and Beyond (Watkins & Biggs 2001) contains therein the assumption that Chinese students should not be able to learn as well as Western students, thereby producing the so-called ‘paradox’.

Ryan also argues that “educationists should be aware of the differences and complexities *within* cultures before they examine and compare *between* cultures” (Ryan & Louie 2007:404), and explains how educationists need to understand their own culture in order to be able to understand any other. The article uses the Confucian–Western dichotomy as a case study to show how attributing particular unanalysed concepts to whole systems of cultural practice can lead to misunderstandings and bad pedagogical practice across the entire cross-cultural educational situation.

“We have attempted to show how characterisations of ‘models’ and ‘virtues’ of educational systems are often too generalised to be meaningful. The concrete and practical manifestations of these general paradigms show that they are often less than helpful. Operating in classrooms on the basis of such stereotypes and paradigms can have negative impacts for students, leaving them untaught and distraught”. (Ryan & Louie 2007:415).

In the last of these three works, Ryan co-edits chapters by nine authors that provide insights into the cultural influences on the learning experiences that Chinese students take with them when they journey around the world in pursuit of their studies. The volume details the unprecedented growth in the internationalisation of universities and university exchange programmes together with the way in which Chinese learners at all levels have taken advantage of these opportunities. This book breaks down into three parts, with part one considering the contemporary emphasis on international education and the central position that the teaching of Chinese learners holds within this. Part two specifically concerns Chinese learners within the international schools of Hong Kong, and the third and final part explores the teaching of Chinese learners by ‘outsiders’ to their culture.

The chapters within this volume paint a rather mixed picture with regard to the question of educational stereotyping of Chinese learners, as some report the hardening of stereotypes whilst others have argued against what they see as prejudices. For example, within the case study written by Wang (2010), she quotes: “many of my students are handicapped by very deep-set stereotypes about race or culture. One of my goals is to bring them out of their shells a little bit, in order to confront these ideas” (Wang 2010 in Ryan & Slethaug 2010:155). Whereas another case study within this same book states: “Stereotyped descriptions of teaching and learning practices by Chinese students and teachers have become ever more irrelevant due to rapid and profound shifts in cultural, social and economic conditions in China” (Chan & Rao 2009 in Ryan & Slethaug 2010:45).

An additional area of concern raised by Ryan and Slethaug (2010) is that although negative stereotypes of Chinese students are still dominant within some educational contexts, Ryan further states that a recent trend, that she terms the “overstated theory” (Ryan & Slethaug 2010:56), may be just as problematic whilst also continuing the perpetuation of misconceived and equally stereotypical opinions of these same Chinese students, but from the contradictory perspective. This trend involves the unrealistic glorification of the internationalisation of education. This is where the pendulum has swung from the ‘deficiency’ model of Chinese students (Ballard & Clanchy 1991) through to the opposite pole of ‘glorification’ whereby such students, or educational systems, are held up as ideal models to be emulated by all (Carroll 2009). Ryan argues that both positions, of deficiency or glorification, should cause equal concern as they are both inaccurate, and it is essential to understand that broadly applying any labelling mechanism (whether it is meant to be positive or negative) can only be to the detriment of any educational situation.

Ryan and Slethaug continue to contend that educators need to avoid both deficit and overstated theories and also the ‘glorification’ of the internationalisation of education, and instead recognise and appreciate complexities both within and between educational systems of practice. The essential theme throughout Ryan’s collection of case studies and the focus that has been central to her work over the past decade is the individuality of each and every student and the individuality of

their educational necessities. This is of such importance because as Clark & Gieve (2006) explain: “By reducing individuals to inadequately understood group characteristics, it approaches racial stereotyping”.

NATASCHA RADCLYFFE-THOMAS

Natascha Radclyffe-Thomas’s 2007 work is particularly relevant to this thesis in that she specifically writes of the enculturation of visiting Chinese students studying art and design in UK Higher Education. She posits that there is a lack of empirical research into intercultural communication in the creative fields, specifically into student learning in art and design (Radclyffe-Thomas 2007). As opinions about art and what constitutes art are culturally bound, this therefore potentially raises problems of providing an effective art and design curriculum within a culturally mixed educational environment, especially when some international students, specifically Chinese, have previously been portrayed as being non-creative (Ballard & Clanchy 1991).

Radclyffe-Thomas argues, in terms that echo Entwistle and Ryan, that creating an open and flexible environment where comments and ideas can flow unreservedly is as important as trying to design a precise, intercultural syllabus. Her comments emphasise that “a student’s cultural identity is not a static construct but a complex ongoing interpretative activity” (Radclyffe-Thomas 2007:42). It therefore follows that teachers of international students must not only acknowledge, but also welcome differences in learning cultures and always be open and flexible when teaching in such environments.

For more than ten years, Radclyffe-Thomas has taught international students at the London College of Fashion where she developed strategies to promote intercultural communication within a creative educational environment. It was here that she found that a student’s individual adaptive potential is reflected not only in their cultural and ethnic background but also in their personality attributes and their preparedness for change, all of which combine to predict the ease of their cross-cultural adjustment. Ryan also describes how she “became increasingly convinced that behaviours were more likely to be context-bound or individually based than defined by nationality” (Radclyffe-Thomas 2007:52). She argues that art and design educators hold a highly

significant position in the mediation of ‘cultural goods’, and it is by recognising existing diversity and adopting intercultural best practice from other fields of education that art and design education can continue to reduce the communication gap between its multicultural participants. This will then allow the promotion of “mutual understanding and adjustment by choice, rather than assimilation” (Radclyffe-Thomas 2007:52).

She makes the point that no one teacher can know it all with regard to teaching international students. However, if a ‘cultural synergy’ model is followed whereby the role of the teacher as an intercultural communicator shifts the emphasis from being the ‘provider’ of all cultural knowledge to the ‘mediator’ between the host culture and that of the visiting student, then the possibility of a successful outcome becomes far more realistic.

“No teacher can have or anticipate all the cultural information that they and/or their students might need; it is rather knowledge of the process of how social groups and social identities function that will benefit intercultural communicators” (Radclyffe-Thomas 2007:49).

As with Gu and Ryan, Radclyffe-Thomas argues that Chinese students’ experiences in UK courses cannot be primarily explained by reference to culture, but rather that it is context-bound and individually based and not simply characterised by any ethnic grouping or cultural characteristic. This was a distinctive position to adopt as a large proportion of the earlier influential literature (Hofstede 1980, Redding 1990, Ballard and Clanchy 1991, Biggs 1999, Watkins & Biggs 2001) had argued that much of the Chinese students’ educational experiences were predetermined by their cultural attributes. For this reason I have included Radclyffe-Thomas among the authors whose work has influenced, and been comparable with, my own.

Summary

This study has been highly influenced by the literature reviewed above, especially that of Janette Ryan and Natasha Radclyffe-Thomas which were the most influential of them all. These two authors are champions of the need to recognise the individuality of each and every student, and I have endeavoured that the guiding

principal of my own research study should be a continuum of the same, a natural next step in the process of such research. The distinctive nature of each student, the subject or discipline, the institutional context, the classroom dynamic as well as each student's individual background are all components of the one whole and should all be valued equally for themselves and taken into consideration throughout each teaching and learning situation (Huddleston 2013).

Within the range of literature that I have presented herewith, there exists a sense of how complex the range of explanations are that have been used to describe the experiences of Chinese students studying within the UK. These explanations range from difficulties with the English language to teaching disparity and social problems, whilst underlying all of these, and more, is the basic differentiation of their 'sociocultural' situation; the visible and invisible differences that can bind or separate people and societies.

“Education is considered one of the primary sources of enculturation and it may be difficult for strangers to ‘enter into the narrative’ of unfamiliar learning cultures” (Dillon & Howe 2003:293).

Probably the single most noteworthy factor that has emerged is that the literature on Chinese students and how they study and fare in foreign contexts has shifted over time. Four approaches, or models, have been identified, with the first two pertaining to how Chinese students study and learn within their home environment, and the last two models relating to how Chinese students study and learn overseas within a foreign educational setting. Further, the following factors have been highlighted as the seemingly critical influences on the approach taken by Chinese students in a foreign university.

First, came the unquestioning belief that culture was the primary explanation for almost everything. Up to the late 1980s, it was considered by many educational authors (e.g. Redding, Ballard & Clanchy) that Chinese students, and indeed the Chinese educational system itself, was ‘deficient’ and unchanging when compared to the West, simply because of the nature of Chinese culture.

Second, by the 1990s uncertainty was creeping into the academic literature because of the increasingly high academic results being obtained by Chinese students compared with their Western counterparts. Some authors (especially Biggs & Watkins) while still focussed on culture tried to explain this by positing that Western educationalists were under some ‘misconceptions’ concerning Chinese education and that the West did not comprehend Confucius-based teaching, nor was it at all interested in doing so. Biggs & Watkins also began to acknowledge the extent to which student’s approaches to learning changed as they were faced by new expectations and controls.

Third, around the year 2000, writers and researchers (e.g. Gu & Schweisfurth) were beginning to ‘reposition’ the previously acknowledged wisdom concerning Chinese pedagogy to focus less on culture and more on the actual students, as Chinese students academic results continued to far surpass those of the West. In addition, many more Chinese students were now beginning to travel abroad for postgraduate studies, and questions were beginning to surface concerning Western administrators’ managing, and Western teachers’ understanding, of the Chinese students’ pedagogical experiences, English language difficulties and general sociocultural support structures.

Fourth, the repositioning of previously accepted knowledge continued to mature and by 2010 large numbers of visiting Chinese students were now coming to study in the West, and there began a paradigm shift as researchers began to question the teaching methodologies provided for Chinese students. Contemporary authors (e.g. Ryan and Radclyffe-Thomas) were positing that a distinctive, ‘individually’ based, student-centred approach within a personalised and refined curriculum would give the best prospects for teaching and learning success. Within the latter two models, the shift is away from explaining Chinese students experiences primarily in terms of culture towards explanations that recognise their individuality and focus on the nature of the curriculum provided, including its social content and support with a focus on language and sociocultural adaptation, as with all international students.

As can be seen from the four models which I identified and summarised above, which covers the period from 1980 to the present day, each of them represent an

aligned, incremental development that accords with the modernisation, and positive transformation, of Western social values with regard to non-Western nationals.

Through all of the above discussions what has been noticeably lacking, and what we do not get a real understanding of, is what differentiation in ‘problems’, there is between diverse disciplines, and what changes, if any, take place over time for the students. For instance, what are the different problems that students face between logical disciplines such as mathematics and engineering; and creative disciplines such as art? The features of art and design that make it such a distinct discipline must surely provide a *prima facie* case (especially from the perspective of those who argue that Chinese students are lacking in creativity and critical thinking) that their ‘problems’ will be more acute within the creative disciplines of Art and Design than within the more structured discipline of Mathematics. Whether this is in fact the case or not evidently requires further research, which is a purpose of this thesis.

The reality that nearly all of this literature is based upon dominant Western research (Asante 2006) has to be acknowledged, as one solitary viewpoint constitutes only a single perspective. However, there are now a number of contemporary East Asian writers such as Ng(2004), Choo (2007), Louie (2007) and Zhou (2009) for example, who continue to extend the work of previous authors and are looking to freshly compare Western and Chinese pedagogies. This is a good indication for the future of education generally and for cross-cultural research in particular, for it has always been the aim of this research project to assist in some small way the transformation of not only these participating students, and all students that may follow hereafter, but also contribute to cross-cultural education as a whole.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

Introduction

The purpose of this research study is to develop an understanding of the experiences and concerns of Chinese students who attend postgraduate studies in creative disciplines within a UK university. Additionally, a longitudinal research perspective was undertaken that covered the full two years of the university course, thereby allowing the student's experiences and concerns to be examined in greater detail over the entire length of the programme. Accordingly the two research questions that have been addressed in this thesis are:

1. *What are the experiences and concerns of Chinese students studying within postgraduate creative programmes in a UK university environment?*
2. *How do these experiences and concerns change throughout their two-year courses?*

Both of these questions have been derived from the author's personal involvement with international students in a higher education environment. Further development of the questions was drawn from subject matter discussed during informal preliminary conversations in October 2009 with the newly arrived intake of East Asian students. Additionally, this research study is located within the context of the substantial growth of international students enrolling into UK universities that provide courses not readily available in the student's own countries (Chan 1999).

The aim of this research was therefore established as:

To acquire an understanding of the longitudinal experiences, and possible concerns, of Chinese students who attend postgraduate studies in creative disciplines within a UK university; and to investigate these experiences over the full two-year period of their UK university courses.

Methodology

In 1996, Scott and Usher wrote how qualitative educational research (within cross-cultural and sociocultural contexts) could enhance the diversity of the perceptions of educational practice and theory. They also described the practice of teaching and

learning as “value-laden” and “a contested concept, with different individuals and groups conceptualising it in different ways” (1996:155). Similarly Best and Kahn opined that the reason that qualitative research data is so effective is that it is “sensitive to the social, historical and temporal context in which the data is collected” (1998:242). They also stated that the distinctiveness of qualitative research is that “it permits the researcher to discover reality without having to fit it into a preconceived theoretical perspective” (Best & Kahn 1998:242).

A qualitative methodology examines the why and how, not just the what and when, and has a strong basis in the fields of education and sociology. The results of qualitative research are descriptive rather than predictive and its strength is its ability to provide complex textual descriptions of how people experience any given research situation. It provides information about the ‘human’ side of an issue, that is the often contradictory behaviours, opinions, emotions, and relationships of individuals. As Gubrium and Holstein explain:

“In qualitative interviewing, the respondent's experience has diverse qualities and meanings and the interview can explore these and their social organisation” (Gubrium & Holstein 2001:57).

Qualitative methods are thus seen as effective in identifying unanticipated factors whose role in the research may not be readily apparent. The goal is to see the situation from the perspective of the participants, and to understand how and why they come to their particular perspectives. This method thereby allows for flexibility, openness and familiarisation between the researcher and the participants thus allowing a more informal atmosphere to take place, leading to a greater understanding of any given situation and an improved chance of the total exploration of it.

As the purpose of this research was to uncover the experiences and concerns of selected Chinese students it was therefore decided that a qualitative approach to this research would be the most appropriate as all the aforementioned features of such an approach suitably matched the complex cross-cultural context and purpose of this study. Qualitative approaches are typically flexible, allowing openness and familiarisation in the interaction between researcher and participant, and one of the

associated approaches to data analysis within qualitative methodologies is thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke 2013). Given that student interviews were the primary source of data for this study, thematic analysis was chosen as the appropriate means of data analysis. Thematic analysis focuses on identifiable categories and themes of living, actions or experiences. It goes beyond any basic counting of phrases or words in any piece of text and seeks to identify implicit and explicit ideas within the given data. It also emphasises organisation and rich description of data, whilst focussing on identifying, examining and recording patterns from within the collected material (Braun & Clarke 2006). Furthermore it is related to phenomenology in that it focuses subjectively on the human experience and aims to understand how any given situation appears to the research participants (Guest & MacQueen 2012). This approach emphasises the participants' perceptions, feelings and experiences as the principal object of study. Embedded in humanistic attitudes, thematic analysis empowers the giving of voice to the 'other' as a key component in qualitative research. This allows the participants' to discuss the topic in their own words, free of any constraints from fixed-response questions that can be found in quantitative studies, thereby allowing the participants' interpretations of any given situation to be fully understood. Guest (2012) argues that it is important that researchers conducting thematic analysis go beyond any surface meanings and attempt to give a deeper and more complete sense of the data, thereby giving a more comprehensive explanation of what that data really means. "Thematic analysis is a very useful method for capturing the intricacies of meaning within the data set" (Guest 2012:11). Accordingly, thematic analysis with an interpretive approach was selected to inform this qualitative research study, thereby enabling recognition of how the students had come to perceive their experiences and challenges throughout their two years of study in the UK.

In the field of qualitative analysis it is essential to be systematic and open to the difficulties of the task of understanding other people's perceptions (Entwistle 2003). So it was in this study where by using thematic analysis the data was gathered, examined and classified into themes which reflected the importance to the respondents (Rabiee 2004). It was necessary to make this process as transparent as

possible to assist rigour and trustworthiness, and to also provide a trail of evidence for follow-up confirmation. As Rabiee (2004) states:

“The first step in establishing a trail of evidence is a clear procedure of data analysis, so that the process is clearly documented and understood. This step will allow another researcher to verify the findings; it safeguards against selective perception and increases the rigour of the study” (Rabiee 2004:657).

This approach to thematic analysis was therefore characterised by a focus on developing thematic content from narrative accounts gathered from interview data that was guided by the chosen research questions and objectives. The practice of analysing the interview data would begin only after each transcript of the audio-recorded interviews had been examined for veracity by its contributing student and that they had thereby agreed to its individual accuracy.

Identifying participants

A check with the university Registration Office as to the composition of the September 2009 student intake determined that 96 new students of East Asian heritage had registered at this university. These 96 students originated from various countries throughout the East Asian region. Of these, 61 were from the Greater China Region (i.e.: People’s Republic of China (PRC), Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macau) and after a preliminary invitation via email, 31 of these students met with the researcher and agreed to commit to the long-term, three-part interview process of this project. Of these 31 students, 23 were from the PRC, 4 from Taiwan, 3 from Hong Kong and 1 from Macau. I was aware that although these four national groupings had many similarities they were not homogenous. Unfortunately with my small cohort of students overall, and the very small numbers of students from societies other than the PRC, I made the decision to group these 31 students together as a single cohort and not explicitly attempt to differentiate between them*. I reflected further on this decision whilst analysing the data, and this is discussed on page 93.

* This over-simplification would become more apparent when some differences in experiences and corresponding responses between the four Chinese nationalities, and also a variation in response by gender, became apparent within the later analysis (see page 93).

The reasoning behind the decision to group all of the students together into one unit was my awareness that my sample size was already rather small; so small that any claims that might be extrapolated from this research could be questioned. However, although neither global nor statistical significance could be claimed I do nonetheless claim that this study provided qualitative significance. While possibly lacking in breadth and scale this study does however provide great depth of insight into the experiences and concerns of the participating Chinese students.

The next step in the research process involved a meeting with all of the 31 individuals who had agreed to participate in the study. At this meeting the background and purpose of the research and exactly what was needed from each student was explained in detail to them. The group consisted of 20 females and 11 males (approximating the gender breakdown of the university as a whole) with ages ranging from 23 to 28 years. There were 29 students studying on two-year MA courses, in varied specialisms within the discipline of Art and Design (see Figure 5, page 72), with the remaining two students enrolled on two-year MPhil courses in Graphic Design.

A consent form had previously been prepared (see Appendix 3) that followed British Educational Research Association (BERA) ethical guidelines. This was now given to each of the participants, with researcher contact details incorporated, so that any questions that the students had, both then and later in the research period, could be answered. Each student's right to withdraw their participation, without any negative consequences, was repeatedly expressed to them. The protracted two-year commitment that would be necessary for the completion of this research was also explained to them, as was the overall purpose of the entire project, so that there could be no misunderstanding regarding the reasons for, or the ultimate use of, the research data. The consent form included all the points of information that any participant could possibly require, with each student countersigning it to indicate that they had read and fully understood it.

The five main points of the consent form were:

1. Their confirmation that the research project had been fully explained to them and that they had been given the opportunity to ask any pertinent questions.

2. Their understanding that participation was not only voluntary but that withdrawal from the research was possible at any time without any explanation required.
3. Their understanding that even though all interviews were audio-recorded their responses would be securely stored and kept confidential and anonymous.
4. Their agreement to take part in the present research project.
5. Their agreement for the collected data to be possibly used for future research.

Additionally, the consent form contained the researcher's full name and contact details. The point that the participating university had given permission for this research project to go ahead was also included so that the student could be under no misconception as to this important point. The form was duly signed by both the student and the researcher, dated, duplicated and a copy given to the student. The original form was then filed away securely, available for scrutiny by the ethics committee, the examiners or other appropriate persons at any time then or later, should the need arise. The consent form contained a printed outlined box wherein a 'Participants Identification Number' (PIN) could be added, so that from that point forward the students' anonymity could be guaranteed by the use of the said PIN.

There was always something uncomfortable about consigning numbers to people because of the obvious impersonal connotations involved, but equally there was no desire to allocate culturally appropriate pseudonyms to them either, which has been done before in some other studies (Scourfield & Davies 2005, Wilson & Wilson 2010). Assigning a different capital letter to each student (i.e. Student A, Student B etc.) was considered but that could also be construed as hierarchical, and the statistic that there was to be 31 student participants and only 26 letters in the alphabet obviously made that system difficult. In the circumstances and in order to achieve the least problematic descriptor possible, I concluded that a basic numbering system would be the simplest and most suitable way to document each individual student (i.e. Student 1, Student 2 etc.). The process of allocating numbers to students was then simply done on a 'first come, first done' basis.

Once the participating students had been duly selected they were again reminded of the reasons for, and conditions of, the research study that they were now a part of.

Figure 4: Participating Students Personal Profiles

ID No.	Gender	Age	Nationality	Marital Status	Children
1	M	28	PRC	Single	None
2	F	26	Taiwan	Single	None
3	M	25	PRC	Single	None
4	F	24	PRC	Single	None
5	F	26	Hong Kong	Single	None
6	M	28	PRC	Married	Boy x 1
7	F	24	PRC	Single	None
8	M	25	PRC	Single	None
9	F	24	PRC	Single	None
10	F	26	PRC	Single	None
11	F	23	PRC	Single	None
12	F	23	Hong Kong	Single	None
13	F	28	PRC	Single	None
14	M	24	Taiwan	Single	Girl x 1
15	F	27	PRC	Single	None
16	M	25	PRC	Single	None
17	F	23	PRC	Single	None
18	F	24	PRC	Single	None
19	M	26	Taiwan	Single	None
20	M	26	PRC	Single	None
21	F	24	PRC	Single	None
22	F	27	Macau	Single	None
23	F	25	PRC	Single	None
24	F	27	PRC	Single	None
25	M	28	PRC	Married	Boy x 1
26	F	28	PRC	Single	None
27	F	26	Hong Kong	Single	None
28	M	23	Taiwan	Single	None
29	M	24	PRC	Single	None
30	F	26	PRC	Single	None
31	F	27	PRC	Single	None

Extra time had been allocated for questions and answers but surprisingly there were very few. Those that were asked were rather elementary, such as where and when would the interviews take place.

The next step was to obtain the background information of each of the students (see Figure 4 on page 68 and also Appendix 4). This was important for three reasons: one was simply to confirm that each of the students were eligible to take part in the study (for example that all of them were from the Greater China Region and that none of them had previously studied in the UK). The second reason was so that I could more accurately compose the upcoming interview protocols and questions that were to be used during the interview process itself. The third reason was that a fuller understanding of these students would allow me to anticipate and thereby resolve any issues with the overall research process before it became problematic. Consequently a written questionnaire was produced to obtain information on the student's general and educational backgrounds (see Appendix 4). Information was requested on this form regarding the students marital status, number of children etc so that the researcher could be aware of any 'hidden' pressures that might be placed upon the students that could possibly lead to additional stress that would affect their experiences and thereby the research itself.

This collecting of background information (see Figure 4, page 68), which I had presumed would be quite straightforward, soon became a cause of anxiety amongst some of the students, as their suspicion arose as to why I needed to know such details about their family backgrounds. This caused real worry to some of them, as they could not understand what this personal information request had to do with research into international education. Therefore to alleviate their concern I quickly arranged a meeting with all of the students, where quite lengthy discussions were had and where I was able to assure them that my interest in their backgrounds was based solely upon ascertaining influences on them as students in the UK. I further reminded them that all of the collected data would be handled and stored securely and totally confidentially. The personal contact that I had made with them seemed to ease their anxiety, and the point that I had taken the time to talk to them on a one-to-one basis, as well as in a group setting, appeared to please them enormously. These face-to-face

meetings had now cemented a stronger relationship that would stand us in good stead throughout the duration of this study.

Position of power

I fully realised that engaging in research on students from my own institution was open to problems arising from my holding a ‘position of power’ (Heron & Reason 2006), but given the need for and potential benefits of the study I felt that it was definitely a problem worth facing. As I was at this time employed at the university as a Staff Manager and did not personally teach any of the participating students, I was therefore not in any immediate position of power, thereby contributing to the neutrality of the situation. Nor was I involved in formally or informally assessing the work of any of the students involved in the study. The additional fact that most contributing students were from departments other than my own also added to the reduction of the students’ perception that I might be in a position of power.

During the initial phase of this study, whilst interviewing those who had offered to take part in this research, a large amount of time and effort was spent in explaining to the students exactly what their participation would comprise of, so that there would be no surprises for them and that they would be properly ‘informed’ before giving their consent. It was also made abundantly clear that should they no longer wish to participate ‘voluntarily’ then they could leave immediately with no regrets on either side. A great deal of effort was made to obtain volunteers who were interested in participating, because if anyone would drop out later on in the study it could adversely affect the research outcome. So, there was absolutely no interest in pressuring uninterested students to participate, and perhaps by luck there were in fact no leavers during the entire research process.

Perhaps at this point a distinction should be made between the different interpretations of the word ‘power’ when used in such educational circumstances. There are various sources of power, but in broad terms a distinction can be made between authority and influence. Authority is legitimate power which is entrusted in leaders within formalised institutions, whereas influence represents an ability to affect outcomes by use of personal characteristics or expertise (Bacharach & Lawler 1980). Authority is a static, structural aspect of power, which due to my lack of any

specific authority over these students did not present any difficulties to our relationships. It is however true that due to my position on the university staff there may have been some underlying sense of authority on some basic level of consciousness, but I believe that any power that I may have had over these circumstances came more by influence than authority. This influence came about because of the growing engagement between myself and the students over a lengthy period of time causing a mutual confidence of trust to develop between us. I believe that this clearly shows in the detailed and highly personal comments that were shared with me during our interview sessions. As such I do believe that we developed a good and close relationship and it was one that was based upon a position of mutual respect with no sense of power present from either party. The intended outcome was that the dialogue resulting from this engagement allowed us to negotiate the complex transaction between equality and difference (Schein 1985).

Method of data collection

Each student undertook three separate interviews that were carried out at three major points during their course: firstly, three months from the beginning of their course; secondly, in the middle; and thirdly, at the end. Between the interviews the audio-recordings were sent to the previously hired transcription service who returned the finished transcripts to be checked for accuracy by the relevant student and then further examined by the researcher to thereby attain any possible new direction that might feed into future interviews. This allowed for any perceived inconsistencies that arose during this two-year period to be appropriately investigated and properly analysed. It is perhaps a little surprising that not one student disputed the accuracy of the transcripts throughout the entire study, but I believe that this can be accounted for by the polite acquiescence of the students together with the accuracy of the transcription service.

The resulting analytical data was documented in detail to form a reusable record of all the findings and analysis of this research study for any possible future usage.

Interview protocol and field notes

The interview protocol consisted of a series of open-ended, exploratory questions. To ensure proper attention to detail, a skeletal set of rudimentary questions was scripted (see Appendices 5 to 7) to act as a protocol cum checklist to confirm that all relevant

Figure 5: Participating Students Academic Profiles

ID No.	Previous Degree	Previous Specialism	Previous Degree obtained in	This Degree	This Specialism
1	BA	Graphic Design	PRC	MA	Graphic Design
2	BSc	Product Design	Taiwan	MA	Design Interaction
3	BA	Animation	PRC	MA	Animation
4	BA	Fine Art	PRC	MA	Illustration
5	BA	Illustration	Hong Kong	MA	Illustration
6	MA	Graphic Design	PRC	MPhil	Graphic Design
7	BA	Animation	PRC	MA	Animation
8	BSc	Vehicle Design	PRC	MA	Vehicle Design
9	BSc	Industrial Design	PRC	MA	Product Design
10	BA	Animation	PRC	MA	Animation
11	BA	Textiles	PRC	MA	Textiles
12	BA	Communication Art	Hong Kong	MA	Graphic Design
13	BA	Graphic Design	PRC	MA	Graphic Design
14	BA	Textiles	Taiwan	MA	Textiles
15	BA	Animation	PRC	MA	Animation
16	BA	Graphic Design	PRC	MA	Graphic Design
17	BA	Illustration	PRC	MA	Illustration
18	BA	Animation	PRC	MA	Animation
19	BSc	Textiles	Taiwan	MA	Textiles
20	BA	Animation	PRC	MA	Animation
21	BA	Illustration	PRC	MA	Illustration
22	BSc	Product Design	PRC	MA	Product Design
23	BSc	Vehicle Design	PRC	MA	Vehicle Design
24	BA	Illustration	PRC	MA	Illustration
25	MA	Graphic Design	PRC	MPhil	Graphic Design
26	BSc	Vehicle Design	PRC	MA	Vehicle Design
27	BA	Animation	Hong Kong	MA	Animation
28	BA	Fine Art	Taiwan	MA	Illustration
29	BA	Textiles	PRC	MA	Textiles
30	BSc	Product Design	PRC	MA	Product Design
31	BA	Illustration	PRC	MA	Illustration

topics of interest were being covered, and in a consistent manner. The preparation of this checklist of questions was to prove particularly useful for ensuring that no areas of importance were overlooked, whilst also allowing specific in-depth probing to be undertaken whenever the situation dictated it. Additionally the checklist acted as an anchor to keep the dialogue within the necessary boundaries so that appropriate comparisons could be made between all of the students' comments through all three sets of interviews.

The questions used were intended to ensure gentle inquisitive probing so as to slowly access the information required for this research project. The researcher was sensitive to the students reaction to this questioning and took great care not to offend or upset their sensitivities. It was necessary to be aware that these students were young, vulnerable individuals in a completely unfamiliar environment. The questions themselves were dealing with personal experiences and concerns of these students, so it was necessary to be aware that at any time one of the questions might arouse a students innermost feelings.

The first set of interviews were undertaken three months after the start of the first term, around December 2009, thereby allowing the participating students sufficient time for issues and concerns to emerge since their arrival in the UK. The questioning encompassed any concerns that they had felt or any experiences or challenges that they had faced in their first three months in the UK; and how these concerns, experiences and challenges had been handled. Subsequently during the Intermediate interviews in September 2010, and particularly during the Final interviews in May 2011 (by which time the students had been exposed to the UK educational environment for almost two years) there were further extensive discussions about their experiences and concerns. Their main issues seemed to centre upon language problems, academic differences and social difficulties, and how these had changed over the two-year duration of their courses.

All of the questioning was done in an open-ended manner to allow them to speak freely upon their experiences in as open and complete a way as possible. The students were reminded that they could say anything that they wanted to, and whatever they did say would remain confidential and anonymous. They were

repeatedly asked if they had any questions that they would like to ask of the researcher or if there was anything else that they would like to add 'for the record'. The few that did respond to this mainly asked what was the researchers opinion of the discussions that they had just had, or what opinion did the researcher have of the Chinese students themselves?

The interviews were conducted in the neutral location of a seminar room, where there was minimal chance of any disturbance, where both interviewer and interviewee would be equally at ease with neither gaining any 'benefit' from the location. The environment was purposefully kept basic, with just an iPod (as the audio-recording apparatus) along with paper and pens for field notes (see Figure 6, page 77). The student's permissions to allow the recording of their interviews were obtained before the recording apparatus was employed. The choice of an iPod as the recording device was a conscious decision as it is an item that most students are very familiar with and would therefore lessen any possible anxieties caused by the process of recording with any larger or more complicated pieces of equipment.

The interview room was quiet, warm and comfortable; all designed to achieve a relaxing atmosphere. Sufficient time was allocated for each of the interviews (on average approx. 45 minutes) to allow for full and complete discussions with no urgency and no distractions allowed to impair the environmental ambience. This allowed the students to speak openly, without reservation; the interviewer assisted the free-flow of conversation, where necessary, by paraphrasing techniques such as simplifying, clarifying and summarising. Minimal verbal responses from the interviewer further aided the continuity of dialogue from the student to the researcher throughout the interviews.

The interviews were later transcribed verbatim by an independent qualified transcription service, thereby aiding both rigour and trustworthiness due to the transcribers impartiality, neutrality of association and their professionalism. Each student was then given a copy of their own transcribed interview and asked to verify the accuracy of its contents. It is a testament to the quality of the verbatim transcription service that all of the students accepted the veracity of their transcripts without requiring any alterations. However, simply transferring words from a

recording device to paper, even via high quality transcription, is not in itself sufficient. When people are in conversation, only a proportion of their message is communicated in the actual words that they use (Cruttenden 1997). A variable amount can be transmitted via the way that people speak, with tone and inflection being good indicators of a whole range of feelings and meanings that do not always readily transfer to standard transcription (Wells 2006). These and other non-verbal communications, such as body language and facial expressions, were noted by the researcher in field notes, which when used together with the verbatim texts helped to give a fuller picture of the context, as well as the content, of the interviews (Grabe 2004).

The field notes were employed, alongside the transcripts, to recollect the mood and character of the interviews and to thereby place the whole thing into context. These notes covered two main areas: descriptive information and reflective information, that augmented the researcher's memory of the session and thereby supplemented the conventional transcribed data. The notes provided a coherent description that fostered self-reflection and aided in the recollection of the context of the interview to produce meaning and understanding of the overarching social situation of the phenomenon being studied.

The interview procedures determined that the same person undertook all of the interviews, thus ensuring minimal variation in interviewing style or practice, and also ensuring that the overall management and control of the research procedure was constant throughout. Due to the interpretative nature of this research project, all interactive investigations were undertaken by means of audio-recorded, semi-structured, interviews with written field notes of observations of the students throughout the questioning process. By such means, a greater depth of insight and reliability was added to the investigative process.

Throughout the interviews, the interviewer used bracketing (the act of suspending judgement) to gently explore the depths of the 'lived experiences' (Heidegger 1998) of the respondents regarding their involvement within the unfamiliar landscape of UK education. The relaxed atmosphere allowed the interviewees the freedom to be reflective, while the interviewer took advantage of any opportunity to explore more

deeply any issues of interest that emerged naturally. The interviews continued until the data was saturated, as demonstrated by repeated duplication of responses and frequent silences. The interviewer wrote basic field notes immediately upon the conclusion of each interview (see Figure 6, page 77), these were based upon observations during each specific session. These field notes incorporated the interviewer's clarifications and reflections and chronicled any procedural matters outside of the ordinary. The notes were later employed as complementary information during the analysis of each students' interview.

Subsequently, all of the audio-recorded interviews were professionally transcribed in a verbatim manner; because correct analysis depended upon the examination of precise interview data, and complete immersion within that data was the best way to fully engage with, and properly comprehend, the students' experiences and concerns.

Initial set of interviews (January 2010)

The initial interviews, averaged thirty minutes duration, started with preparatory questions concerning the participants' personal and academic backgrounds and whether they had access to any support structures (relatives or contacts) within the UK. This being our opening discussion it was taken rather slowly at first to put the students at their ease. After this deliberate start the interview was broadened to explore their experiences of the university, tutors, fellow students and the UK in general. As their UK experiences had only consisted of around three months at this point, it was probably unreasonable to expect too much profundity. However, the concerns and experiences that they had gained were discussed in as much detail as possible. Nonetheless, all student concerns were fully recorded and any that were of significance were noted as requiring follow-up questioning in the next set of interviews, where further details could be obtained and expanded upon in an appropriate longitudinal manner.

Intermediate set of interviews (September 2010)

The intermediate interviews, which averaged thirty-five minutes in length, were carried out with the same 31 students as previously interviewed. They followed along a similar framework to the initial interviews except that now the students' had spent more time at the university they were therefore in a better position to discuss

Figure 6: Example of Field Notes (from an Initial set of interviews)

FIELD NOTES

Set of interviews: **INITIAL** Date: 2/11/09

Student identification: **(3)** Time: 10-40am

Location / Context: Room 208 @ UWI. / One to one context.

Students' demeanour / First impressions: A quietly positive individual, although quiet he nonetheless exudes a strength of character. Possibly a little unsure of his surroundings & the situation. Reserved — ? personal trait or cultural ?
An "open" body posture but "tight" and controlled.

General notes:
Slow to respond to questions — seems uncomfortable in the one to one/face to face context.
Seems to be answering questions in a way he feels will please me — possible subservience to "authority figure" ?? personal or cultural trait ??
He sends mixed messages between his conversational and his body language.
He is embarrassed by his English language skills. . . . could this be part of the explanation for his body language/mixed messages etc.??

Towards the end of our time he seems to be taking a deeper approach to the questions & answers.

Final comment:
His initial reticence to respond is probably explained by his lack of belief in his own English language skills and "strange" surroundings. He ~~is~~ will blossom when he settles and his English improves with usage/time.

their experiences and concerns in greater detail. Twelve months had elapsed since their introduction to the university and it was noticeable that these students were now more at ease than in the first set of interviews, and as such began to talk more freely concerning their likes and dislikes, their problems and their possible solutions to those problems. Their growing relaxation was illustrated by their willingness to reveal aspects of a more personal nature, and their increasing trust in the interviewing process was demonstrated by the quality and the amount of data that increased as the interviews progressed.

Final set of interviews (May 2011)

It is perhaps not surprising that the final interviews lasted the longest, approximately fifty-five minutes, and presented some of the most in depth data. Again, it involved the same group of thirty-one students, but now they were far more confident in both themselves and their surroundings. They were no longer self-conscious about their English language skills, as over the two years of their studies their communication skills had developed greatly. No longer were they unsure of talking to me about their thoughts regarding their education, their fellow students and tutors and their pedagogical situations in general. They now discussed in detail their academic and social experiences, and how these had changed, and indeed how they themselves had changed during the time that they had been here in the UK. Many interesting comments emerged from the students, and with the interviews in full flow it was quite a contrast to the reserved, introspective individuals who had walked into their first interviews with me nearly two years previously.

The participating students' intentions along with any subject perspectives, or multiple perspectives, were all documented. Any students holding particularly dissimilar views, approaches, or any factor that distanced or dissociated them in any way from their fellow students was also examined and documented. This comprehensive mode of analysing the interview data was maintained for all three sets of interview recordings (Initial, Intermediate and Final). Supplementary information recorded within the field notes (see Figure 6, page 77) of each student's non-verbal communication (i.e.: kinesics or body language) consisting of body

posture, gestures and facial expressions (Ekman 1999) from within the interview process, were also merged into the total analysis package.

The individuality and diversity of each student was an important underlying consideration, with systematic questioning being used to obtain the fullest possible answers that explored each students' thoughts and feelings on all of their issues of concern. This can be a particularly difficult proposition, even when there is a unity of language connecting the interviewer and interviewee, but it becomes increasingly difficult when there are both language and cultural distinctions between the two. Nonetheless, over the two year period a meaningful working relationship was achieved (illustrated by the quantity and quality of data obtained) that explored each of their individual perceptions concerning their most reflective thoughts about their experiences and concerns within their UK environment.

Process of analysing interview data

The process of analysing the interview data via thematic analysis involved five distinct but interconnected steps. The first step of this planned approach was familiarisation, which involved detailed reading and re-reading of the verbatim transcripts (to ensure complete immersion within the texts) and successively linking field notes to transcripts to ascertain all possible information that could assist the understanding of the contexts surrounding the data and thereby contribute to the comprehensive analysis of the interviews (Braun & Clarke 2013). The second step involved identifying a framework of general 'categories of interest'. This framework was informed by the research questions and developed by ideas and concepts that formed throughout the information-gathering process but also particularly by the reading, and re-reading of the transcripts (Guest 2012). The next step, the third, was the categorisation and indexing of all of these categories of interest by associating all relevant pieces of text, linking any recurring patterns and connected concepts. In this way the professionally transcribed audio interview data was carefully examined, over an extended period of time, using a free manual line-by-line coding process, with pertinent texts and patterns of experiences or concerns being identified and selected to be divided into groupings that reflected the previously identified categories of interest (Corbin & Strauss 1990) such as student experiences and concerns. These categories of interest were entitled in a natural and straightforward manner, for

example 'student experiences' and 'student concerns'. Later, these categories would be sub-divided into increasingly refined groupings that exhibited the student's individual experiences and concerns in a specific, detailed manner. This examination continued by separating the categorised text into component parts of their core subject matter that were examined for commonalities and variations which were in turn graded for subject matter or themes (Kelle 2005). A comparative analysis methodology was used in an interpretative manner, which required the taking of one piece of data and comparing it to all other pieces of data. Throughout this process, the researcher looked at what it was that made this piece of data particularly similar, or particularly dissimilar, to all of the other pieces. This method of analysis was primarily inductive, with the researcher examining the data critically and drawing appropriate meaning from that data (Glaser 1965). Ultimately, over an extended period of time and with great diligence, all of the data was categorised by this same reasoning process.

When all of the data had been categorised, it was then re-examined for properties that characterised it (properties are specific attributes of a category). The data was further examined with associations being identified by making comparisons across the data, looking for parallels and variances between the student comments. In this way corresponding data were grouped together to form hierarchical sub-categories. After all of the categorisation was completed for the first time, the data was revisited and the process repeated with the information that had remained outside of categorisation, thereby further refining the data. This process was repeated until all the data had been grouped into closely defined categories and then further separated into themes, thereby ensuring that everything that could be gleaned from the interviews had been so.

Themes are characterised as units derived from patterns such as conversation topics, recurring statements, meanings or feelings. Themes are recognised as "bringing together components or fragments of ideas or experiences, which often are meaningless when viewed alone" (Leininger 1985:60). The definition of the terms 'Category' and 'Theme' are shown in Figure 7 overleaf.

All recurring themes were duly recorded in the fourth step: that is, the sorting and cataloguing of significant descriptive text, the assignment of descriptive labels with additional explanatory notes, and the grouping of emerging thematic content extracted from within the narrative accounts (Hammersley 2015). The process of analysing the content involved the segments of germane text being compared across all other student transcripts, continually revisiting the data and reviewing the classification of the data until the researcher was sure that the categories and themes used to summarise and describe the findings were a true and accurate reflection of the data (Glaser 1965). It was when comparing sub-themes to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the data that patterns often emerged. When they did emerge the researcher obtained feedback from the informants about them. This was done either as the interviews were taking place or later by asking the students to give feedback from the professionally transcribed interview data. In the former, the interviewer used the students feedback to establish, or modify, the next questions in the interview. In the latter, the researcher asked the student to provide feedback from the transcribed interview data that was then incorporated into the theme analysis.

Figure 7: Definitions of terms ‘Category’ and ‘Theme’

DEFINITIONS:
Category: <i>A ‘category’ is a generalised grouping of wide-ranging student experiences and concerns, all of which have been recognised from within the verbatim interviews.</i>
Theme: <i>A ‘theme’ is a specific subject area that describes the phenomenon contained within a ‘category’, thereby demonstrating the distinctive characteristics of the student’s experience or concern. It captures something important in relation to the overall research questions.</i>
Example: <i>‘Language’ is a category, but ‘Students English Language Problems’ will be a theme within that category.</i>

The fifth and final step was the interpretation of all of the accumulated data, thematic subject matter and associated notations to form a detailed analytical report.

“One of the tasks here is not only to make sense of the individual quotes, but also to be imaginative and analytical enough to see the relationship between the quotes, and the links between the data as a whole” (Rabiee 2004:658).

From the start of the data analysis, the categories of the students main concerns were identified that would cover the major variations in their conceptions of the situations they encountered; hierarchical sub-categories were then identified within the main ones in a process of continual refinement. Recurrent themes were then isolated and any linkages to them identified and sorted within a hierarchical framework. Particular attention was paid to data relevant to the research questions and any other pertinent focal themes identified in the interviews. Continual refining and interpretation then followed, which sought to systematically corroborate and refine any uncovered categories into their thematic content. The labelling of these categories and themes* closely followed the wording of the two research questions, and/or the students' own vocabulary, wherever possible. For example the two primary categories were unpretentiously entitled 'student experiences' and 'student concerns'. The categories and themes that were sought were those that could be clearly defined and seen in relation to one another in a coherent hierarchy.

The thematic selection process consisted of extracting important verbatim statements from the students interview data and articulating significances about them through the researchers interpretations, selecting the most applicable meanings into a series of organised themes, elaborating on the themes through rich interpretive description to ultimately deliver a definitive analysis report (Butler-Kisber 2010).

There is always the potential for ambiguity to occur when dealing with any sociocultural situation, as all human interaction is fraught with uncertainties and misunderstandings. So it was when defining the recorded interview data and allocating the student quotations into specific categories and subsequently into themes. The differentiation in language and values between student and researcher can potentially play an important part in these circumstances. The classification of student responses is not an exact science but more of an erudite artform*, so that the combined elements of research and literature reviewing with peer and participant collaboration all combine with the researchers overall experience in the field in

* It was thought to be appropriate that the designation of all categories and themes should follow the students own terminology whenever possible.

* As the research developed so too did my understanding of what I was finding (i.e. my understanding improved as the study progressed, with my thinking changing over time).

question to enable the most accurate selections or examples to be chosen to illustrate each significant instance found within this research study.

Definitions of found themes

Throughout the research findings and the analysis of the same, the term ‘Language problems’ was defined as the problems that the Chinese students had in communicating in a second language, specifically English, within their UK environment. The manifestation of these communication problems could be printed, written or spoken; with speech undoubtedly being the primary problem of these students. ‘Pedagogical differences’ was defined as the differences that the students found between the style of teaching and learning that they had experienced in the PRC and the style expected of them by their UK staff within their UK educational establishment. ‘Sociocultural difficulties’ was defined as the difficulties the Chinese students experienced, within the UK, during any social interaction with other (non-Chinese) students, university staff and sometimes with members of the general UK public.

The chosen form of analysis was used upon the interview data to assist with the overall understanding of the students on both an individual and group basis, and always within the students own contexts. All individual and group relationships were properly documented and compared with all others, with the aim of categorising any similarities or opposing differences between responses. The data collected was classified according to its relevance to the research questions, focusing upon the patterns and frequencies of topics and comments mentioned by the interviewees. All important responses, patterns or commonly occurring themes were identified and fully recorded for future usage.

A valid argument for the selection of the themes was built by reading the related literature. By referring back to this literature, combined with both peer and participant corroboration, information was gained that allowed inferences to be made from the interview data. Once the themes had been selected and the literature studied, theme statements were then formulated to develop a narrative. When the literature was interwoven with the findings, the narrative that was revealed was one

that stands with rigour and merit. Such a developed narrative supports the reader in comprehending the process, understanding, and motivation of all of the students both as a group and on an individual basis.

Rigour, trustworthiness and ethical propriety

Intellectual rigour is a fundamental component of any effective research, for if any one piece of research is lacking in rigour, or attention to detail, then anything gained from that piece of research may be flawed, thereby potentially making that entire line of research invalid. For within the research process one revelatory finding can often lead to another, creating a linkage in the entirety; therefore if one of those original findings is flawed in any way then that whole line of research inevitably becomes meaningless and without any true value. Additional confirmation of the intellectual rigour of this research was achieved by means of literature searches, used as control elements (Krefting 1990), which were limited to within the findings of comparable studies and related educational data.

A fundamental part of any research study is its 'trustworthiness' as this is of great importance in evaluating its worth. Lincoln and Guba (1985) posited that the trustworthiness of any research study involves establishing credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. With regard to the trustworthiness of this particular interview data it was preferable to enhance its 'credibility' by greater control of its constituent elements. For instance, interview questions were devised that were precise and rational, with their meaning clear and without any possibility of confusion for the respondent. This then ensured that the answers given by the interviewee were as accurate as possible, and therefore more trustworthy. Conversely, it was possible that too much rationalisation in the questioning could have led to less dependability as the more rational and detached the interviewer becomes the more likely it will be that the interviewee will perceive this interaction as indifference and uncaring (Kitwood 1977), and if the questions become too calculated it is likely that the responses would also become overly calculated, which would be to the detriment of the research.

Additionally, with reference to this particular data, the rigour and trustworthiness was further established by using a form of three-part investigator triangulation as described by Denzin (2006). The first part of the triangulation was established by the participating students' verification of the accuracy of their own transcribed interviews. The second part was the successful authentication by an impartial teaching colleague that a random selection, of his choosing, of the verbatim transcripts accurately matched the corresponding interview audio-recordings. The third and final part of this triangulation was the reverification by this researcher of the trustworthiness of the entire interview process from start to finish. This process of triangulation helps to demonstrate the study's rigour and trustworthiness. The advantage of such veracity within social research is that it provides authenticity to the complexities of human behaviour and situations in which humans interact, with research methods acting as filters through which any situation is selectively experienced. The 'transferability' and 'dependability' of the data analysis was further authenticated by thorough planning, the continuous use of recorded observations (audio recordings and field notes), structural consistency and comparison with previously authenticated studies (CETLQ 2004).

The overall 'confirmability' was reinforced by an appropriately managed audit by a teaching colleague, totally unconnected to this thesis, who examined the individual procedures and the overall neutrality of the research. First, he looked at the overall concept of the research and whether the selection of methodological procedures and techniques were appropriate. Then the selection of the student participants was checked to ensure their eligibility and suitability for the research process. Next came the interview procedures, the practical collection and processing of the recorded data and the associated transcription, the checking and rechecking of interview recording to transcription and back again to the student, thereby confirming their recollections of the same. Ultimately, the auditor concluded that the chosen process was applicable to the research undertaken, that neutrality was applied consistently and without researcher bias. So, finally the theoretical and practical dimensions of analysing the interview data alongside the objective understanding and sympathetic interpretation was complete.

The social sciences in general and educational researchers in particular have become increasingly conscious of ethical propriety in recent years. With this in mind, comprehensive ethical procedures were adhered to throughout the duration of this particular study, including informed consent of all respondents and ensured confidentiality and anonymity, all in accordance with the ethical procedures of the Institute of Education (IoE) and the British Educational Research Association (BERA).

All of the research undertaken herein followed the Research Governance and Ethics Policy of the IoE/UCL. Therefore before any research was embarked upon a preliminary outline submission was made to the IoE Ethics Committee (see Appendix 10) to ensure that sound ethical principles were fully adhered to and continuously followed at all times.

Any issues arising in the course of the research were, in the first place, discussed with my IoE supervisor and then if necessary presented to the IoE Ethics Committee. The ethical dimensions of the entire project were reviewed regularly and any significant change of direction would have been referred to the IoE committee. In addition to the IoE Ethical Procedures, the BERA 2004 guidelines were also continuously adhered to, thereby guaranteeing that correct principles and consistent standards were maintained throughout this project.

Language disparity

With regard to the obvious language differentiation between the students first language (Mandarin or Cantonese) and the researchers first language (English) there was always the obvious potential for incompatibility. Although the researcher did not speak either Mandarin nor Cantonese the fact that the Chinese students had not only studied the mandatory English language classes of the PRC's national school system, but had also participated in IELTS* (or TOEFL) language courses, lessened the likelihood of any such incompatibility. Additionally, the fact that the participating students UK university courses were also to be conducted in English, and with no

* *The UK university used in this study requires an IELTS acceptance score of 6.5, with a 6.0 in the 'Test of Written English'.*

better alternative available, it was agreed between all of the students and the researcher that English would be the standard language of this research study.

However it was always realised that the potential for language problems would be continually present, and so it was to be. These problems were not only between Chinese students and UK university staff but also between Chinese and UK students, and at the base of these problems was usually English language, or the lack of it. The Chinese students concerns over language caused complications in their inter-relationships and brought genuine unease for the individuals concerned. This unease produced an initial lack of progress in the learning of many students and an accompanying personal anxiety and loss of self-confidence for those involved. The situation prompted a reluctance in some students to interact with non-Chinese personnel as their own perceived lack of English language skills was not only thought of by them as a substantial practical difficulty but had now progressed beyond a language problem and had become intertwined with personal and emotive issues such as a sense of disgrace and humiliation. These negative experiences contributed to some students developing a feeling of rejection from the entire non-Chinese university community. This precarious situation was slowly resolved by a combination of factors. First, with the passage of time and general usage, the Chinese students English language gradually improved. Secondly, the non-Chinese international students became a lifeline to bridge the gap between the Chinese and the UK students and staff. This came about as the Chinese students found that they had fewer or similar problems communicating in English to other international students than to native UK students. They surmised that this was because the other international students would not only speak slower, but also more clearly defined and without repetition or slang words, and as these international students clearly understood the problem that the Chinese students were facing then the international students would simply make more of an effort to be understood. At the same time a few UK tutors who had recognised the Chinese students' language problems had adopted learning strategies that actively promoted participation from these individuals, and this was later found to have played an important role in boosting the Chinese students' confidence and helping them to engage with their fellow students just as they had originally wanted to.

Problems addressed

Although the method of investigation for this research study was always intended to be a qualitative longitudinal methodology utilising semi-structured interviews, it was also originally planned that it would be complemented by a quantitative, structured, on-line questionnaire. However, after the completion of the questionnaire by the students, and a methodical examination of it by the researcher, there was found to be very little of value within it. This lack of value was later shown to be due to an error on my part, of sub-standard induction of the participating students, thereby causing the resulting data to be unusable. What had happened was that the Chinese students had completed the questionnaire in such a cautious and minimalistic manner, answering all questions in either an overly accommodating fashion or in the way that they thought I would like them to. For instance, when the questionnaire asked if they had had any negative experiences at their UK university and if so could they provide an example. They answered that all of their experiences had all been positive because “it was the best art and design university in the world”. Such answers were obviously designed to please the researcher but instead only had the effect of totally unbalancing the results and thereby making them unusable. The choices now available to me were to use data that was not only overtly compliant but also seemed to be completely inaccurate, or to admit my mistake and abandon the questionnaire all together. Now, with time quickly passing, and the initial interviews underway there was no time left to properly repeat a questionnaire that was already tainted, therefore it was decided to abandon it. I thanked the students for their kind intentions whilst gently explaining that it would be far more beneficial to any research process if, in future, they would communicate their answers in a more direct and impartial manner. This they readily agreed to do, and furthermore it was decided that this experience had not been a waste of time as both parties had now learnt something new from it that would stand them in good stead for the future.

With the quantitative questionnaire now abandoned it was necessary for the qualitative interview methodology to be supplemented so that it could now stand independently. This was done by means of adding a further set of interviews at the centre point of the students courses to uncover how their development was progressing at this mid-point of their endeavours. Originally the interviews were to be undertaken only at the beginning and the end of the students two years of study.

However, it was now decided to supplement the information to be collected by the addition of a further data collection point, thereby allowing greater width and depth of examination to be carried out upon the students and their studies.

Summary

It was decided that open-ended, semi-structured student interviews would be used as the investigative method for this study, thereby allowing the students to 'speak for themselves'. Thematic analysis was selected as the mode of analysis for the interview data. This approach was characterised by a focus on selecting and developing thematic content from narrative accounts gathered from interview data that was guided by the research questions and the research objectives. The transcripts of the interview recordings were carefully examined using free manual line-by-line coding, with particular texts being identified and selected (according to meaning and context) to be divided into groupings that reflected categories of interest (Corbin & Strauss 1990), for example 'student experiences and concerns'. Relevant themes were eventually extracted from these categories of interest and interpreted to form a detailed analytical report for this study.

Within this chapter the research methods and methodology of this research study have been described. The following chapter will now explain what was found by the use of these research methods.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

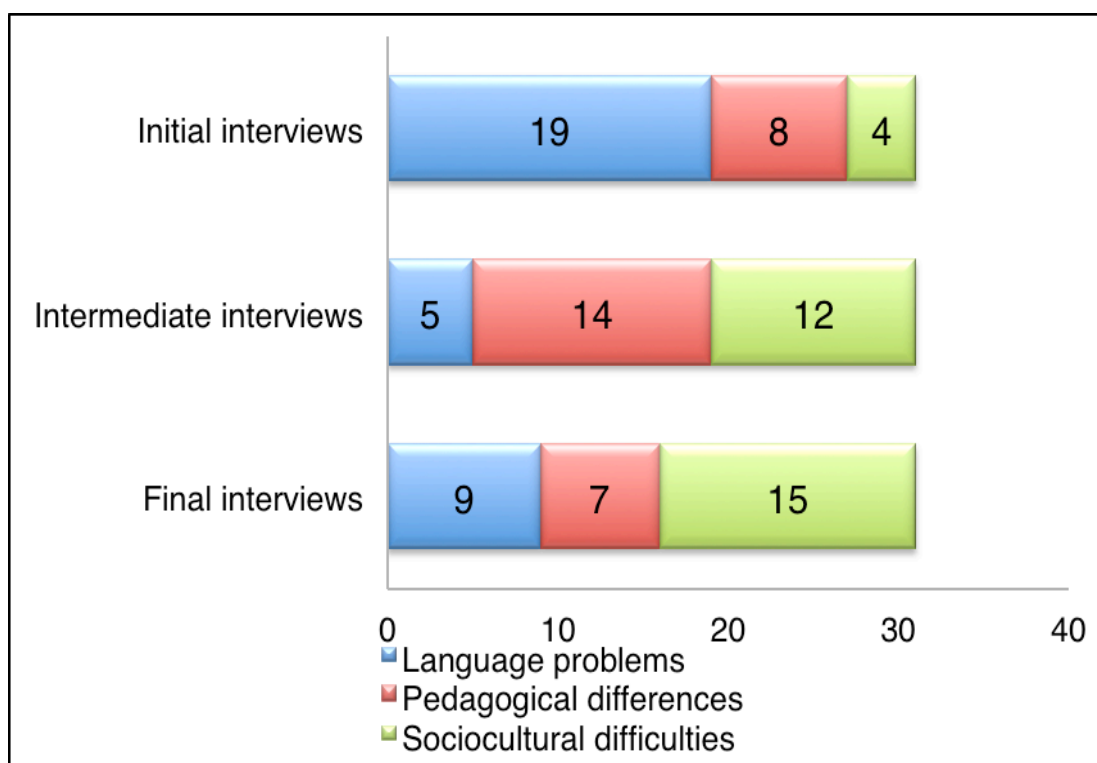
Introduction

From the start of the interview process it was evident from the interviews that three specific concerns were their most significant challenges, and as such the students continually spoke of these throughout the course of their interviews. These three concerns were language problems, pedagogical differences and sociocultural difficulties. Within this study the term *Language problems* refers to the problems that the Chinese students had in communicating in a second language, in this case English, within their UK environment. The form taken by these communication problems were written, printed and spoken, but with speech undoubtedly the primary problem of the three. *Pedagogical differences* refer to the differences that the students reported between the style of teaching and learning that they had experienced in the PRC and the style expected of them in the UK. *Sociocultural difficulties* relate to the difficulties the Chinese students experienced, within the UK, during social interaction with fellow (non-Chinese) students, university staff and sometimes with members of the general public.

There were, understandably, other points of concern besides these three that were discussed (from food, weather and personal relationships to loneliness and artistic freedom) but overwhelmingly, time and again, the students brought the focus of the interviews back to the three main concerns mentioned above. It was an early but important finding, so it was decided to probe more deeply when these concerns were subsequently raised. By these indirect means a clearer understanding of the main experiences of these students was uncovered.

Overview

This chapter is divided into three related sections, with the first describing and analysing the findings from the initial set of interviews that began in December 2009. The following two sections will employ the same format with regard to the intermediate (begun in September 2010) and the final sets of interviews (begun in May 2011), with each section concluding with an overall interpretation of their findings.

Figure 8: Numbers of students and their concerns across all interviews

This first section begins with an analysis of the initial set of interview findings divided into three groups (labelled Primary, Secondary and Tertiary), indicating, in descending order, the largest or predominant number of students that have the same primary category of concern, followed by the second largest number with their own primary concern, and lastly the third with their particular primary concern. These ‘categories of concern’ were classified as such by the order, frequency, duration and intensity of each of these statements. These concerns emerged from the reading, and re-reading of the transcripts, when pertinent comments by the students were beginning to be identified and divided into groupings that reflected the students stated experiences. This selection process found significant verbatim statements from within the interview data and interpreted their importance to this study via extensive literature exploration and methodical research. The most appropriate extrapolations were made and selected into a series of organised themes, those themes were then elaborated upon through rich interpretive description to ultimately deliver a definitive analysis. The quotations that I draw upon within this chapter are predominantly taken from the primary concern expressed by the students, and is clearly specified as such.

Figure 9: Initial interviews – three main concerns of each interviewee

STUDENT	PRIMARY CONCERN	SECONDARY CONCERN	TERTIARY CONCERN
1	LANGUAGE	PEDAGOGICAL	SOCIOCULTURAL
2	LANGUAGE	PEDAGOGICAL	SOCIOCULTURAL
3	SOCIOCULTURAL	PEDAGOGICAL	LANGUAGE
4	LANGUAGE	SOCIOCULTURAL	PEDAGOGICAL
5	SOCIOCULTURAL	PEDAGOGICAL	LANGUAGE
6	LANGUAGE	PEDAGOGICAL	SOCIOCULTURAL
7	PEDAGOGICAL	SOCIOCULTURAL	LANGUAGE
8	LANGUAGE	PEDAGOGICAL	SOCIOCULTURAL
9	LANGUAGE	SOCIOCULTURAL	PEDAGOGICAL
10	LANGUAGE	PEDAGOGICAL	SOCIOCULTURAL
11	LANGUAGE	PEDAGOGICAL	SOCIOCULTURAL
12	LANGUAGE	PEDAGOGICAL	SOCIOCULTURAL
13	LANGUAGE	PEDAGOGICAL	SOCIOCULTURAL
14	LANGUAGE	SOCIOCULTURAL	PEDAGOGICAL
15	PEDAGOGICAL	SOCIOCULTURAL	LANGUAGE
16	PEDAGOGICAL	LANGUAGE	SOCIOCULTURAL
17	LANGUAGE	SOCIOCULTURAL	PEDAGOGICAL
18	PEDAGOGICAL	SOCIOCULTURAL	LANGUAGE
19	LANGUAGE	SOCIOCULTURAL	PEDAGOGICAL
20	LANGUAGE	SOCIOCULTURAL	PEDAGOGICAL
21	LANGUAGE	SOCIOCULTURAL	PEDAGOGICAL
22	LANGUAGE	SOCIOCULTURAL	PEDAGOGICAL
23	PEDAGOGICAL	LANGUAGE	SOCIOCULTURAL
24	PEDAGOGICAL	SOCIOCULTURAL	LANGUAGE
25	SOCIOCULTURAL	PEDAGOGICAL	LANGUAGE
26	PEDAGOGICAL	LANGUAGE	SOCIOCULTURAL
27	LANGUAGE	PEDAGOGICAL	SOCIOCULTURAL
28	SOCIOCULTURAL	PEDAGOGICAL	LANGUAGE
29	LANGUAGE	PEDAGOGICAL	SOCIOCULTURAL
30	PEDAGOGICAL	SOCIOCULTURAL	LANGUAGE
31	LANGUAGE	PEDAGOGICAL	SOCIOCULTURAL

TOTALS: Language = 19 of 31
Pedagogical = 8 of 31
Sociocultural = 4 of 31

Pedagogical = 15 of 31
Sociocultural = 13 of 31
Language = 3 of 31

Sociocultural = 14 of 31
Language = 9 of 31
Pedagogical = 8 of 31

Occasionally, and I have indicated where this is the case, I have also selected quotes to illustrate other non-primary responses as they were especially helpful in elaborating good examples of the students range of concerns.

The students' primary concerns (i.e. those initially identified and stressed by the majority of respondents) within the interviews have been categorised within this thesis as 'Primary concerns', the second most-important as identified by the next largest number of students have been termed 'Secondary concerns'; and 'Tertiary concerns' are those identified as being of concern to the third largest number of students. These three terms have been used throughout this study, in both text and charts, to signify a three-tiered, sequential level of importance to better explain the student experiences and concerns as they occurred.

The number of participating students and their particular concerns across all three sets of interviews are shown in Figure 8 on page 91. This figure also identifies how many students are linked to each concern in sequence through the three sets of interviews.

Figure 9, on page 92, will identify the three main concerns of each of the individual thirty-one students, all gathered from within the Initial interview data. It is also notable from Figure 9 that the repetition of the sequence of these three main concerns of each interviewee from the initial interviews (Language, Pedagogical and Sociocultural) was repeated eleven times, or more than a third of the total, within this figure. The data presented in Figure 10, on page 95, illustrates the related theme of the primary concern of each separate student and is based upon an analysis of how often these concerns were repeated and the length and intensity of the statements made about them by each student during the period of their Initial interview.

It should be noted that while some very minor differences in experiences and responses between the four Chinese national groupings (PRC, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macau) did emerge from the interviews none were of any pronounced significance to this study. Additionally as the number of students involved, other than those from the PRC, were so small (1 from Macau, 3 from Hong Kong and 4 from Taiwan) it was decided that this was not a variable needing consideration and

as such it did not contribute to the overall analysis. In terms of gender differences however; it did become more apparent that the female students seemed to adapt and cope with their new environment more quickly than the males.

The student's quotations, within the text of this chapter, are verbatim extracts taken directly from their individual interviews (see Appendix 9 for an exemplar of a complete verbatim transcript) followed by an analysis of both the said quotations and the conditions and circumstances that surrounded them.

Figure 10: Initial interviews – Themes of primary concerns

STUDENT	PRIMARY CONCERN	ILLUSTRATION . . .
1	L	Language skills good but reticent in dialogue with UK native speakers
2	L	Difficulty understanding Tutors & Administrators produces confusion
3	S	Lack of UK friendships causes withdrawal into national grouping
4	L	Difficulties communicating with non-Chinese personnel
5	S	Complications settling into UK surroundings
6	L	Lack of everyday speaking skills becoming apparent
7	P	Misunderstandings over teaching methods causes student anxiety
8	L	Extent of inadequate language skills causes academic complications
9	L	1 st year student looks to 2 nd years for help with language problems
10	L	Reports of difficulties understanding tutors regional accents
11	L	Chinese language tuition focused on reading, and not the spoken word
12	L	Lack of understanding of UK tutors impacts negatively
13	L	Repeatedly requests tutors to speak slower during lectures
14	L	Chinese student asks for English language classes, here in the UK
15	P	Difference in Chinese / UK pedagogy negatively affecting learning
16	P	Confusion and anxiety due to students idealistic teaching expectations
17	L	Their lack of language skills necessitates more printed handouts
18	P	Expectation of UK tutors to teach the same as Chinese tutors do
19	L	Reports of language problems inside and outside of university
20	L	Chinese student uncertain of what is required of them here in UK
21	L	Student reports tutors using 'slang' words that are not understood
22	L	Lack of English language obliges student to resume ethnic grouping
23	P	Pedagogical differences between GCR and UK causes unease
24	P	Unrealistic expectations by teachers said to cause learning difficulties
25	S	Problems with UK society, both inside and outside of university
26	P	Disagreements with GCR student over UK assessment protocols
27	L	Student prefers speaking to international rather than UK students
28	S	More difficult making friends with UK students than internationals
29	L	Student persistently requests handouts in place of his note-taking
30	P	General misunderstandings with UK educational policies
31	L	Conversations with UK students causes confusion to this student

KEY to Primary Concerns:**L** = Language problems[19 of 31 students cited this
as their Primary category]**P** = Pedagogical differences[8 of 31 students cited this
as their Primary category]**S** = Sociocultural difficulties[4 of 31 students cited this
as their Primary category]

Section 1 - Initial Interviews

Initial interviews: Language problems

The analysis of the Initial interview data revealed that ‘Language problems’ were the primary concern of the largest number of students (19 of the 31). The second largest number of students (8 of the 31) had a primary concern of ‘Pedagogical differences’, while the third largest number (4 of the 31) related that ‘Sociocultural difficulties’ were their primary concern.

As Figure 11 (below) shows, three months after their arrival in the UK the majority of the students perceived language-related problems as their major source of concern.

Figure 11: Initial interviews – Primary concerns

INITIAL INTERVIEWS	
1st concern: Language problems, cited by 19 of the 31 students as their Primary Concern	
Overarching Themes	Concerns over communication with non-Chinese, particularly difficult with tutors. Causing complications in relationships with any non-Chinese speakers, and a personal loss of self-esteem and anxiety for certain students, thereby prompting isolationism in some.
2nd concern: Pedagogical differences, cited by 8 of the 31 students as their Primary Concern	
Overarching Themes	Problems understanding unfamiliar UK teaching methods negatively affected learning progress, difficulties compounded by students general misinterpretation of UK academic doctrine. Feelings of confusion begin.
3rd concern: Sociocultural difficulties, cited by 4 of the 31 students as their Primary Concern	
Overarching Themes	Difficulties arise socialising with non-Chinese, communicating on any deep level is too demanding for their language and social skills at this time. Also, difficulties have arisen with UK public outside university, i.e. from professionals - doctors, to non-professionals - shop workers etc.

Because of the student perceptions of their situations in the UK an atmosphere of insecurity and confusion gradually developed amongst some of the participants. Students 5, 13, 15, 20 and 26 viewed their situations as personal inadequacies and a negative reflection upon their abilities. Such a loss of self-esteem caused an immediate deflationary effect upon the initial enthusiasm that was created by their engagement with their new surroundings.

“It is really different and difficult here. I knew that before I come but still it was a surprise, I need time to adapt to this system but sometimes I am not used to it, I mean for me it is not just the education but living and talking in a foreign country. I have to care about everything. I am having to study English and I have to always practice and everything, sometimes it is so difficult to do”. (Student 5, Initial interview, page 6).

“We were taught with traditional book learning, not in a talking way. They talk quickly here, with different accents and strange words, it is difficult to understand or keep up”. (Student 26, Initial interview, page 5).

During these initial interviews (begun in December 2009) it soon became apparent just how great a challenge English language-related communication was to the majority of these participants. Many of them commented upon this in some way, with some profusely apologising for their “bad English” whilst relating how this had made acclimatisation to their studies in the UK more difficult than they had anticipated. It had also made the initial interviews themselves a little more difficult than expected but by slowing down the pace of the conversation, ensuring proper diction was maintained by the interviewer and confirming that full comprehension had been achieved before progressing further, all of this ensured that the challenge of interviewing newly arrived Chinese students in English was suitably met and overcome.

These students comments confirmed the findings of Tian & Lowe (2009) who had previously recorded that many students within their study saw their inadequate English conversational skills as an individual failure and a public embarrassment. Comparable findings were demonstrated within this Initial interview process and Students 13 and 18 provide further examples:

“I was frustrated many times after I came here, sometimes I got misunderstood from other people because of my expressions, wrong expressions, sometimes I realise that I fail to communicate to my tutor or my fellow students and then I feel sad and upset, and sometimes I was crying”. (Student 13, Initial interview, page 4).

“I feel so ashamed when the teacher asks me to answer a question because I do not really understand what she wants to tell me, I cannot follow her language. So, when it was time for the group presentations I could not do mine. I was so ashamed, I cried. Now the teacher and students they do not discuss projects with me like they used to, so I do not learn. I just go round and round in circle, and I get nowhere”. (Student 13, Initial interview, page 5).

“I cannot understand them when I am surrounded by English language and talking with English people, really I cannot understand, so that is a big problem for me”. (Student 18, Initial interview, page 4).

Such comments highlighted the students perceptions that they lacked English language skills which were a serious practical difficulty that went beyond a basic language problem and was now interwoven with emotional issues such as shame and ‘loss of face’. Negative experiences such as these can quickly and easily lead the students to a “sense of exclusion from the learning community” (Tian & Lowe 2009:665). Additionally, statements by Students 13 and 22 record them being “ashamed” and “embarrassed” by their lack of language skills, which is reflected in the writings of Hofstede (1980, 2001) who described the Chinese concept of ‘loss of face’, stating “In a collectivist society, discussing a persons performance openly with him or her is likely to clash head-on with the society’s harmony norm and may be felt by the subordinate as an unacceptable loss of face” (Hofstede 2001:241).

Even between these three students (13, 18 and 22) who had experienced the same shame and embarrassment there was still some differentiation. Student 18 viewed this embarrassment as being his own fault, repeatedly stating how it was “his problem” and that it was a problem for him to personally solve. Whereas Students 13 and 22, although equally feeling the shame and embarrassment, they felt that this was instigated by the situation that they found themselves in upon their arrival in the UK; in short they ‘blamed’ the UK staff. Although perhaps a somewhat simplistic view it was nonetheless understandable considering the major disturbance caused to them by their change in circumstances from China to the UK. Hofstede further

argues that, within Chinese society, subtler and more indirect means are generally employed to provide comment or criticism from tutors to students. This was reflected in the comments of Student 22:

“In China, my professors would not ask any questions directly because Chinese culture is so inoffensive; but in the UK, the teachers ask questions very directly”. (Student 22, Initial interview, page 3).

Hofstede also described how Chinese students could possess real anxieties regarding making mistakes with language and having differences with teaching staff (Hofstede 2001:235). Biggs and Watkins also argue that the reasons behind this may be deep rooted in the Confucian teaching traditions of China with its emphasis on correctness and harmony (Biggs & Watkins 1996) instead of a more westernised appreciation of individualised communication skills (Radclyffe Thomas 2007, Ryan 2011). Hofstede also commented in 2001 (Hofstede 2001) that students might not regard mistakes as a natural part of the learning process, but see them only as a threat to their image and a source of negative evaluation from both tutors and fellow students alike. As Student 22 continues to explain:

“The problem that I have is my lack of good English language, it causes me to have a feeling of anxiety while searching for answers . . . and if I could not say clearly what I am doing or what I want to do, then the teachers are angry with me. Once, I was required to do a research project, but I did not tell teacher that I did not understand what was wanted. Later, when teacher asked me for the project I try to say that I was not good at research methods and so had not done it. The teacher was surprised and I think angry. He thought I should have said it to him before and he said that the class could not waste any more time with me. I was shamed and embarrassed”. (Student 22, Initial interview, page 3).

The student comments also echo the writing of authors such as Schweisfurth & Gu (2009) when they described Chinese students’ lack of English linguistic skills being shown to directly influence student and staff interaction, peer cooperation and general intercultural acculturation by Chinese students within English speaking educational communities.

“Sometimes the reason why I am quiet is because I did not understand what teacher say”. (Student 14, Initial interview, page 2).

“I get worried and nervous talking with my tutors. I have been learning English for many years back home, but I still feel frightened when I talk to them here. Because of my poor spoken English, the tutors always get lost in my meaning and they do not understand me. And I too often fail in understanding some of their language when talking with them too. So, worries and anxiety during our tutorials make me become shy, which leads to more mistakes in my work. In order to avoid anyone knowing of my bad spoken English, I try to reduce the time of talking with the tutors and this is bad for my learning”. (Student 20, Initial interview, page 2).

Thus for Student 20 (above), his language proficiency led him to remain silent and distant from his tutors, which has the potential to be mistaken by a tutor as a stereotypical portrayal of a ‘uniform’ Chinese learner.

“I sit quietly and politely. I might not get it because I did not understand what exactly was said. I can ask a question but that question could be off, not right, so I kind of worry”. (Student 16, Initial interview, page 5).

Some students described how they tried to employ various positive strategies (Students 6, 18, 16 and 21) to help with their English language difficulties. Student 16 thought that watching old English television programmes would help:

“I am trying to understand English language better by watching some old British TV drama, but it can be hard to understand it . . . anything that I can get about British drama, but never American, I want real English . . . not American drama, if so I change to other channel”. (Student 16, Initial interview, page 4).

Another approach from Student 16, and Student 6, was that attempting to mix with large numbers of British students would inevitably help to improve their own English language skills, if only by consistent immersion in that language.

“I am trying to hang out with British people . . . if I come home after two years and my English is really bad it will be really embarrassing . . . if I found a group of British people I am trying to join their group to get some information or advice and just know their things, their thoughts, yes I am trying”. (Student 16, Initial interview, page 4).

“For the language I had to learn English as fast as possible so I think it is better for me to make some good English friends to help me. I think at that time it was quite necessary and I am happy about that”. (Student 6, Initial interview, page 2).

The strategy of Student 18 was more straight forward: she would simply make a note of any questions she would need answers to (when in lectures, workshops or wherever) and then when in her regular one-to-one tutorials she would simply ask her personal tutor for the answers . . . one after another, after another . . . often to the surprise of the tutor. The student’s reasoning was that if she repeatedly asked questions during lectures then she was interrupting the class and therefore impolite to others who were trying to concentrate, whereas in a one-to-one setting she had the complete attention of the tutor to herself, with no difficulties of interrupting others who were trying to learn. A secondary side effect was that this also enabled the student to feel less awkward about her lack of ‘knowledge’ in front of the rest of her peers.

“It makes me feel sometimes very awkward . . I can ask some questions but I cannot ask them again and again . . I think that it is impolite because everyone else understood already and I am kind of interrupting this class and I feel more like it is wrong”. (Student 18, Initial interview, page 2/3).

A further strategy was used by Student 21, when during lectures or seminars she would simply sit with a large number of other Chinese students and they would take it in turns to ask any questions that they needed the answers to. That way no one student would stand out as repeatedly disrupting the class with repetitive questioning. Another benefit to this strategy was that with such a large number of students available to help each other they would hopefully possess a reasonably complete set

of answers available from within their own group, with the additional benefit that being a part of a large grouping reinforced their individual self-confidence.

“I sit with other Chinese students, lots of them, and I either ask the people around me like what does that mean and what did he say or something. Then we take turns to ask him so that we do not stand out. Sometimes I just go afterwards and ask my friends”. (Student 21, Initial interview, page 4).

Whilst analysing these Initial interviews it became apparent that at this stage of their studies language-related problems were indisputably the primary concern for most of these students, both inside the university and outside in the UK community. It was increasingly obvious that their lack of proficiency in English was presenting tangible difficulties with their education in the UK, especially when the entire two-year curriculum was taught in English. With inter-communication being a basic and essential educational requirement it was now evident that this problem had to be approached as a joint undertaking between the university staff and the students, and not simply as a problem for individual Chinese students to solve on their own. As Student 8 explained:

“I think the English academic test requirement is a problem as far as I think. We require like a 6 for the English test, because they want understanding and communication with other people, but without any problems you would probably need a score of 9 and that is a full score. Yes, first I think maybe it is a problem of the requirement of speaking English and second the exact needs for the course; so there is a gap between them”. (Student 8, Initial interview, page 2).

Initial interviews: **Pedagogical differences**

Whilst the analysis of the Initial interview data clearly established that the largest number of students (19 of the 31) experienced ‘Language problems’ as their primary category of concern, 8 out of the 31 students made up the second largest number who identified ‘Pedagogical differences’ as their primary concern at this point in the course (see Figure 10, page 94 for each students three main categories of concern).

Originally, upon their arrival here in the UK, some students were very pleasantly surprised by the individual freedom that was immediately available to them and the openness between students and staff generally. This initially pleasant surprise soon gave way to a feeling of uncertainty when they came to realise that this freedom of action was in fact a ‘double edged sword’, insofar as they now had to take the initiative themselves to organise their own programmes and work schedules. Not all of the students reacted positively to this, as shown in the quote below where Student 15 clearly explained her thoughts.

“When I studied before in China, the teaching materials, photocopies and everything else were prepared by the teachers before and then given to us in class. In China, all the students have to do is to attend classes on time, sit quietly in the classroom and listen to the teachers. In China a good student is one who finishes their work on time, gets a good score in examinations and always obeys the college rules. When I come to my first year of MA study in the UK, I felt so miserable because the teaching staff would make me study in class. Every week, we have many hours of tutorial work where the tutors only guide us to think and help us to gain knowledge, instead of really teaching straight to us”. (Student 15, Initial interview, page 1).

This sense of confusion for some students first became noticeable when the UK tutors ‘failed’ (in the students judgement) to provide a selection of documents and reading materials to the students that could simply be read and digested in a simple and straightforward manner. The fact that the UK tutors were expecting the students to not only select their own areas of study, but to then research this independently to its completion, was something that was alien to most of these students, and many simply could not comprehend it. Their confusion presented itself by them asking each other whether the tutors “do not seem to want to work” or perhaps the tutors simply “did not like them” (Student 14).

“I feel great uncertainty for my learning here in UK, as UK tutors will not tell us what is right and what is wrong, they say we must think it through and find it out for ourselves. So, we have to spend so much

time finding out answers, and this is not right. It wastes so much time, and the researching here is difficult in English language. At home, in China, our tutors always helped, they gave out the answers straightaway, but the UK tutors will not, they want us to do it all, they do not seem to want to work themselves . . . On the first day I expect them to tell me what to do, and they say you must check your calendar and then go wherever you want; do they not like to be with us. I was surprised and it was kind of difficult for me to understand”. (Student 12, Initial interview, page 2).

The independence of thought and action that the tutors were attempting to instil early in the course was linked to the expectations concerning the use of ‘critical thinking’ which was a problematic area for many of these students. The expectation that students needed to adopt a critical thinking approach for themselves was to become an ongoing and evolving problematic situation that would resurface repeatedly, especially within the Intermediate sets of interviews.

“In China people tell me what to do and I do it. Over here I have to find my own way . . . But I think there should be a balance, because right now in the UK it is entirely disorganised, it is not structured at all, so that is a problem”. (Student 2, Initial interview, page 2).

“It is so different from home . . . When I come here I was shocked, I do not know why, maybe it was just the system of the University, and how the tutors are so disorganised . . . For me I feel like, oh no I am paying so much money why do I not feel like I am being educated properly. It was really depressing at the first because it is very different in China because there you are cared for you know, they do everything for you. We have strict timetables, we must do this, we must do that, and we have proper teachers. It is so different here”. (Student 2, Initial interview, page 1).

This impression of a lack of structure and disorganisation was a recurring theme (see Figure 11, page 96) that some of the students linked to what they perceived as an

uncaring attitude from their UK tutors. This seemed to particularly affect Student 2 on two different levels, as it not only affected her negatively on a learning level but also on a personal level whereby she felt that the UK tutors really did not care about her and this troubled her greatly. It now appeared that there was a growing potential for some of these students to distance themselves from their tutors and to withdraw from any meaningful interaction with them, thereby affecting their learning in a substantial manner.

“Sometimes I can’t read teachers writings or understand why they do things, but teacher probably had the same feeling about me, so now I will just ask my friends and get it from them”. (Student 14, Initial interview, page 2).

Circumstances such as those mentioned in the quotation above were now being discussed in the interviews on a moderately regular basis, during the later stage of the Initial interviews, and it was becoming apparent that Students 14 and 16 along with Students 2, 3, 6, 12, 17, 20 and 21 all possessed the potential to withdraw from any effective communication with their UK tutors; as these students had developed a perception that their tutors were completely indifferent towards them. Student 14 was openly stating that his UK tutors were “getting him to do all of the work, they were being well paid and not teaching him anything”. This was obviously problematic for him on a personal level, however potentially even more problematic was that this talk was leading some of the students to think of retreating from collaboration with their tutors:

“I have the worry that I could not talk with teacher, so after the lectures and group meetings, if I had questions and want to learn then I meet my friends and ask them”. (Student 16, Initial interview, page 5).

Students 2, 3, 6, 12, 14, 16, 17, 20, 21 and 22 all spoke of their feeling of being unable to communicate their dissatisfaction to both tutors and university staff, which in turn led to a shared feeling of being marginalised. The students’ perceived indifference of these tutors resulted in the distancing of some of the students from their tutors and discouraged them from trying to learn from them. Students would

either try to rely more on their own personal resources or on their Chinese peers, a voluntary departure from their recognised position of inequality and marginalisation.

“I feel like there are some tutors I am not able to connect with. I just cannot talk to them, I mean I talk about the work but every time I say something and they do not know exactly what I am talking about, then they just talk about something else and it just goes in a different direction, which is not where I wanted it to go, and it is frustrating”. (Student 2, Initial interview, page 5).

“I don’t think our tutors concentrate on their students . . . and I pay a lot of money to this college”. (Student 22, Initial interview, page 3).

The above commentaries show that at this early stage of their two-year Masters courses many of the students were beginning to become unsettled with both the UK teaching staff and their style and approach. This would change in time as a growing understanding, on the part of the students, would lead them to the realisation that their UK tutors did indeed have the same objectives in mind as they did, but that they simply had a different way of attaining them.

Although it would take some time for the students’ attitudes to change there were nonetheless comments made by some of the students, even at this early stage, that showed that the process was at least beginning. For example when Student 3 commented upon the contrast between their previous pedagogy in China and that in the UK he stated:

“I think there is a definite difference between the Chinese way of education and the West. I would say that the Chinese education is really structured and people have to read and follow the rules, they are already there for you, so if you follow the rules you can achieve what you have to do . . . I think people here are very free but they have to work things out for themselves more and they are not told what to do all the time, they are free to do whatever they want to do and that is good but it makes it more difficult for you as a person”. (Student 3, Initial interview, page 3).

The differences that the students had identified related not only to differences in the two educational systems per se, but also to pedagogical differences between their former Chinese teachers and their present UK tutors. Student 1 was surprised at the freedom and openness that existed between students and tutors here in the UK:

“In my college, back home in China, you could not have any real discussions with the professors because the gap between professors and students was really huge. There was no discussion, no conversation even though we were in learning surroundings it was really difficult, if I said something like I disagree with your idea to one of the professors, well I just could not do it because of the very strict atmosphere there”. (Student 1, Initial interview, page 1).

Student 5 reinforced these observations when she also commented upon the openness of the UK tutors towards their students.

“I am very drawn to teachers who are, well, who do not see themselves as being somebody who is superior. So, if I have a problem and I want to say something and speak my mind, I could just go and talk to them and that is how I grow because I think everyone needs a mirror. Sometimes you need to talk about your ideas with someone and if you really click with the teacher then it is just fantastic I think. It is much easier to do that in the UK I think, because teachers here are more about helping you to become who you are or try to draw things out of you. It is all about that rather than like ‘memorise these one hundred words’ and if you could do that then you get an ‘A’. Because in Hong Kong that is what it is all about”. (Student 5, Initial interview, page 3).

The independence and opportunity that Students 1, 3 and 5 suddenly now possessed, not only concerning the openness of the UK tutors but also with regard to the facilities available, was something that was alien to many of them. Whereas previously, in China, they were generally required to be in a certain location at a certain time and complete a certain amount of work each and every day, they now found that (within reason) they could organise their own educational structure, from

selecting which electives to follow to the more mundane managing of their own timetables and timekeeping, as long as they completed their assignments on time and in good order and were present and accounted for at any mandatory classes or specially scheduled events. Student 13 commented upon her interpretation of these differences.

“It was difficult for me to say my own opinion against the teaching before, in China . . . but you know I am not a weak person, so sometimes I tried to say it but I had to be very careful. I think the UK education system is very different from the Chinese system. In Chinese University the schedule was very strict and I had to run fast every day, but I do not have to do that here . . . So that is why this experience is very good for me and I really want to recommend other people to think for themselves, as they do here”. (Student 13, Initial interview, pages 2/3).

It was evident from the comments above that many of the students were exhibiting various levels of unease, revealed by their general anxieties, and their apprehension concerning their studies in the UK. However, it was also evident that there was some movement in the later stages of these Initial interviews that were of a more positive nature and that it was obviously something that would need to be monitored closely during these students journey through the UK education system.

Initial interviews: **Sociocultural difficulties**

With the concerns of the first and second largest groupings now clearly established from the Initial interview data the third largest grouping, consisting of 4 students (Students 3, 5, 25 and 28), indicated that ‘Sociocultural difficulties’ were their primary concern at this point in their studies.

A link between these sociocultural difficulties and the previously mentioned language problems was now becoming apparent, even at this early stage. Obviously, when there is any difficulty with verbal communication it simply exaggerates all other difficulties when attempting any kind of social or cultural interaction. The

understandable outcome of this difficulty was to encourage some students to retreat into the Chinese student community, where they faced no such language problems.

“In the beginning I really want to be good friends and work with other cultures, but in the end I find it really difficult, like you try to become friends in a certain way but somehow it just kind of stay there and I guess it is a cultural problem but sometimes I find it kind of frustrating because I do want to do that and I think that they probably want to do that too, but somehow we do not have the same thinking or we could not really connect that well or anything like that”. (Student 21, Initial interview, page 7).

After initial efforts mixing with students from other cultures some of our students slowly withdrew back into their Chinese groupings, for socialisation, interaction and for mutual support in the face of a perceived indifference from UK tutors, and sometimes from the host UK community as well. These students were now thinking in terms of ‘them’ and ‘us’, a separation which they openly admitted was made along ethnic and linguistic lines as “a classic construction of the ‘Cultural Other’ that debars effective intercultural communication”. (Tian & Lowe 2009:668).

Even when UK tutors attempted to encourage intercultural exchange by bringing the different nationalities together for ‘shared learning’, this was often unsuccessful as the various groupings had little common background knowledge or skill-sets upon which to base their shared output. For Students 3, 5, and 14 this developed into a lack of confidence to engage with native English speakers within these shared settings, and soon differential power relationships were being perceived by them:

“I remember the first time I went to class in the West, I was still in the habit of raising my hand when I wanted to speak and of course that is totally unnecessary here, it was little things like that which made people laugh at me. I would call the teacher Mister or Miss, I would never call them by their first name and if I see you in the morning I would do a bow, I was being respectful. That was just part of my culture to do that

to a teacher; but the other students did not see it that way, they just laughed”. (Student 5, Initial interview, page 1).

This laughter from other students, mentioned in the quotation above from Student 5, would undoubtedly have caused embarrassment to her and would probably have helped to solidify her loss of confidence. An interesting by-product of this lack of confidence in group-participation with UK students was that a new emphasis on ‘being Chinese’ became more important to this small group of students (Students 3, 5, 14, 21 and 28).

“Before I came here I thought I was more Western by culture, but after I came here I thought oh no I am very Asian, and that was good for me”. (Student 14, Initial interview, page 2).

“Being far from home and with so many different peoples, it makes me see that I love my country more and more”. (Student 3, Initial interview, page 6).

This emphasis on ‘being Chinese’ became a means to protect their sense of identity and a source of their personal power. Their apparent lack of confidence, and emphasis on becoming ‘more’ Chinese seemed for some of them to be linked to a change of status. With university fees now reaching an all time high, especially for international students, plus the additional living costs for two years, meant that many students found it necessary to undertake some form of part-time employment whilst here. Their interaction with UK employers and fellow employees drew comments from two of the students (Students 7 and 17). Student 7 felt that employment, such as fast-food server or supermarket shelf-stacker, was reserved for ‘outsiders’ such as her. Whilst back home in China, with her families support, it had not been necessary for her to work and having to do so in the UK seems to have ‘unsettled’ her:

“If I am in China, I mean everything is much easier because I have my parents, family, friends and everywhere. I studied in the best College in China I think and I mean everything is really smooth and I could get a

really good job easily and I could buy something easily and I can get money easily but here everything is so different and difficult. For example, I have to work in a take-away and live in a really small flat and I don't even have Internet. It is really different and difficult here, being an outsider. I knew that before I come but still it was such a surprise". (Student 7, Initial interview, page 2).

With the total cost to Chinese students of studying at a UK university now so expensive, plus the high living costs of Central London, meant that as unpleasant as it was to do such labour, Student 17 found that it was now inescapable.

"A lot of things have changed since I left China. When I lived in China my family was well-off. I did not have any problem about money, I did not need to work . . . and I was always in a group a little bit popular, always kind of special. It is more like realising about the social system and the invisible stuff. When I live in China I speak something and it is important, but if I speak something here it is nothing . . . Actually I am a more important person in China, here I am a no one. I have lost status, I am outside of any social structure . . . I am not at ease, my family is not here, I did not born here, I did not graduate here, I do not have any social network here". (Student 17, Initial interview, page 5).

This emphasis on being 'more Chinese' gave these students a temporary sense of pride and personal power but at the expense of differentiating themselves from the local UK students and also distancing themselves from further intercultural exchange. Students 3, 5, 25 and 28 additionally reported widespread sociocultural difficulties from both inside the university and also outside in the UK community at large. These difficulties occurred at multiple levels, ranging from troubles with 'professionals' (i.e.: doctors etc.) to 'non-professionals' (i.e.: shop workers etc.).

"The whole system, the health system and everything, is all different. So I am like where should I find a doctor, and so I don't really find one; and then people say go to NHS and get a GP, what is a GP anyway,

what should I do to get one, where do I get the paperwork . . . they say just come back another time and I am like, yeah. It's difficult to know what their words mean, trying to find things and build a life here". (Student 28, Initial interview, page 4).

"I do not think the university or the tutors know the difficulties we have when we come here, it is not just the college things going on here, it is everything outside that is difficult as well, with shopping and talking to those shop people . . . do you think those people like us being here?" (Student 3, Initial interview, page 3).

This third set of primary concerns, namely 'Sociocultural difficulties', were also significantly compounded by the student's English language problems, as mentioned previously; but also with their apparent emphasis on becoming 'more Chinese'. These students (1, 6, 7 and 25) had seemingly created for themselves something of a dichotomy whereby the difficulties that they were having in making friends with UK students was possibly pushing them towards greater isolation, whereby in contrast the ability to more easily make friendships with other non-Chinese international students was conceivably drawing them back towards the more centralised and communal areas of international university life.

"I think mixing with British students is more difficult than mixing with international students . . . Other Chinese also seem to mix more with international students than British. British students have their own culture and really are together, unfortunately I could not understand what they are meaning". (Student 1, Initial interview, page 3).

"I found it is easier to become a friend with other Europeans than British students, I think it is just because of the language thing, I mean we all have, how can I say it, poor English so, I mean we can communicate better with non-English because we all have poor English". (Student 6, Initial interview, page 2).

"When I came here I found it more easy to talk to others, not English. I feel English people are a little bit more distant than compared to people

from America or other countries . . . and people often do not have enough language to communicate properly”. (Student 25, Initial interview, page 9).

“International students talk English slowly and they want you to understand, they work harder to make you understand. So I talk better with them than English students”. (Student 7, Initial interview, page 5).

An interesting social and cultural aspect that arose from the comments of Students 2, 8 and 22 concerned food, or specifically Chinese cuisine. A remarkable linkage, both conscious and unconscious, was also made by further comments about food associated to homesickness and loneliness.

“It is the food mainly that makes me homesick. I miss home so much because of the food and then when I went back to China I could not eat it. I did not think I could not enjoy them so much more. I think my taste has changed . . . I have stopped eating oily stuff, but now that I tell you how much I miss it, I think if I go back in the summer now I will eat it”. (Student 2, Initial interview, page 8).

“It is unavoidable that you miss home or the people there, like parents or like their cooking, that is really very strong for me because I really like my Chinese food”. (Student 8, Initial interview, page 3).

“Yes, this winter I had big homesick . . . It made me really depressed, I miss the whole family, sometimes I want to go to my country because of the weather but also the food”. (Student 22, Initial interview, page 2).

As with any students travelling half-way around the world and arriving into an unfamiliar environment it came as no great surprise when Students 1, 28 and 29 talked of their feelings concerning loneliness and homesickness after their arrival in the UK. Here are their comments on this concern:

“I don’t think that I have changed a lot myself since I came here, but my environment, the things around me have changed a lot, and I think that has had effect on me. I felt loneliness at the start of the course and I found out it’s difficult to handle it, I never felt this kind of thing before, but since I come here . . . I was alone. I have found more Chinese here and they are a good thing, and a bad thing, as I don’t feel that kind of loneliness now, but I feel like I am losing my other international friends, because I’m more comfortable talking Chinese and being around these Chinese guys”. (Student 1, Intermediate interview, page 1).

“I think it is a little bit of loneliness, you miss your family, friends and food, I think it is a mix of everything . . . It’s not so bad that I would fly home irresponsibly . . . you just have to get yourself over it, and time will really fly by”. (Student 29, Intermediate interview, page 1/2).

The feeling of loneliness and isolation that was spoken of by Students 1 and 29 was also commented upon by Student 28, although from a slightly different viewpoint, when he spoke of the consequences of isolation involving personal relationships; with specific reference to long-distance affairs with partners back home in China.

“I had a girlfriend, back in China . . . We broke up because of me missing her; I just couldn’t do the loneliness . . . I had to have someone that can be with me, not far away, so we both had a hard time when we broke up . . . there is no answer to loneliness, but hanging around with other Chinese students helped in the end because I meet other girls”. (Student 28, Intermediate interview, page 8).

Overall interpretation of Initial interviews

It was clearly evident from the analysis of the findings from the Initial interviews that the majority (nineteen) of the thirty-one students, upon arrival in the UK, reported difficulties with spoken communication with native English-speaking personnel. This should not have been too surprising as such second language problems had previously been well-documented in multiple studies (Cook 1993,

Andrade 2006, Floyd 2011). Also, none of the thirty-one students had previously studied in or visited the UK, however what seemed to be surprising to both the students and the UK university staff was the scale of the problem.

It also emerged from the interviews that the students reported that they had fewer problems speaking English to other non-Chinese international students than to native UK students. They surmised that this was because the other international students would not only speak slower, but also more clearly defined and without duplication or slang words, and would also simply make more of an effort to be understood.

The majority of the Chinese students had arrived in the UK confident that the English language tuition that they had received in their homeland would enable them to properly participate within the UK academic activities. However, much to their surprise, almost two-thirds of the Chinese students found difficulty with the colloquial or conversational English used within the UK classroom.

Although the important part that language plays in the difficulties of visiting international students is well documented in the literature (Cook 1993, Andrade 2006, Floyd 2011) such authors have tended to concentrate more upon undergraduates and not on postgraduates. Additionally, the finding that the quality of a visiting Chinese student's English language skills were now becoming such an important issue was further demonstrated by the finding that the majority of the contributing students to this study, who had reported difficulties with colloquial English in the UK, had not only participated in the mandatory language classes of the PRC national school system but had also successfully passed their TOEFL or IELTS language tests in China. This will be examined in greater detail within the Conclusions chapter towards the end of this thesis.

Section 2 - Intermediate interviews

Introduction

The Intermediate interviews commenced in September 2010, which was approximately ten months after the start of the Initial interviews. The structure of this section will follow the same format as the previous, with the following three tables (Figures 12 to 14) using the same three ‘categories of concern’ as previously used in Section 1 (i.e.: Primary, Secondary and Tertiary). The first of these tables (Figure 12, page 117) will illustrate the student’s top three concerns derived from the Intermediate interview data, with the numbers and percentages of students linked to each of these in turn. The second table (Figure 13, page 119) will illustrate the three main categories of concern of each of the thirty-one participating students, and denotes the order of importance of these experiences on an individual student basis. The final table of this section (Figure 14, page 122) will define the theme, of each student’s primary concern, which had been determined from the analysis of the accumulated Intermediate interview data.

Overview

Upon analysing the Intermediate interview data it became apparent that, unlike the Initial interviews, there would not be such an overriding preference as to their ‘primary concern’. For in contrast to the findings from the initial interviews, where language problems were cited by twice as many students as the next category, this time the first and second sets of concerns were more closely aligned. ‘Pedagogical differences’ were cited as the primary concern by fourteen of the thirty-one responding students, with a further twelve students citing ‘Sociocultural difficulties’ as their primary concern (see Figure 12, page 117). The last category, cited by only five of the students was ‘Language problems’ which was no longer the number one concern as it had been approximately ten months earlier.

Clearly their previous difficulties with the English language had eased with the passing of time and with their continual involvement within an English language environment. The focus on Pedagogical differences, between what they were used to previously and what they were receiving here in the UK, emerged as their current primary concern

and was starting to cause confusion and frustration for many of the students. This reached a peak about eight months into their studies, when following the customary course curriculum, UK tutors began to demand a more critical thinking approach from the students, with each expected to carry out their own independent research within a specifically defined area of interest, culminating in the completion of a fully self-directed piece of work accompanied by a critically written explanatory essay. Many contrasted this task with their previous experience in China, where their teachers would have given the students all the necessary information for the completion of this coursework; their sole job would then be to assemble the given parts into the best finished product that they could produce. Here in the UK they faced a different philosophy of teaching, and some were not at all happy to embrace the change.

Figure 12: Intermediate interviews – Primary concerns

INTERMEDIATE INTERVIEWS	
1st concern: Pedagogical differences, cited by 14 of the 31 students as their Primary Concern	
Overarching Themes	Methodological differences between Chinese and UK educational instruction causing confusion and unease amongst the students. Disagreements occur with the UK teaching style with some students wanting to return to the previous style of their GCR homeland.
2nd concern: Socio-cultural difficulties, cited by 12 of the 31 students as their Primary Concern	
Overarching Themes	Misunderstandings produce bad feelings between students and staff. Students state that UK tutors do not help them like their Chinese tutors used to, and they wonder if it is because the UK tutors do not like them. Many of the students do not understand why this is happening to them and are at a loss as to how to manage their situation.
3rd concern: Language problems, cited by 5 of the 31 students as their Primary Concern	
Overarching Themes	Their language problems cause uncertainty for them. They are unsure of not only what to do but also how to do it. This uncertainty was causing a lack of progress amongst some of the students. There was however some slow progress with their language skills that provided hope for the future.

Intermediate interviews: **Pedagogical differences**

‘Pedagogical differences’ were the primary concern of the largest number of students (14 of the 31) at this midway point in their studies. However, beneath this finding lies a more complicated picture. Analysis of the interviews suggests that these differences conceal a developmental process involving the students in overcoming personal anxieties resulting from particular challenges to their own academic positioning, including their sense of self and their own personal value systems. As Student 2 explained:

“The challenge for me is to be good for myself, the only challenge is myself and not anybody else, I feel that is the big challenge. To know OK this is what I want to do and go ahead and do it and maybe get criticism from these tutors. I think my problem is that I sometimes get anxious about things and think I should not do this or maybe this is not good and why am I doing this if the tutors say it is not right, so I think having to get over that is the big challenge for me”. (Student 2, Intermediate interview, page 4).

In the course of these Intermediate interviews it soon became apparent that the students first and second concerns were beginning to merge together as their primary pedagogical and their secondary sociocultural concerns began to coalesce. Tensions between the Chinese students and the UK tutors, which had begun a month or two previously, were now developing into a form of discontent by the students towards their tutors. This was apparently due to their UK course commitments beginning to differ markedly from their previous experiences in China. The students were having difficulty accepting the difference, and the tutors were seen to provide little in the way of guidelines. Students 14 and 7 explained their feelings:

“I am not satisfied with the teaching here and sometimes I feel great anxiety in all of the many changes. How can tutors look so relaxed and some students have so much freedom, while I cannot feel that comfortable in my work or in myself”. (Student 14, Intermediate interview, page 6).

Figure 13: Intermediate interviews – three main categories of concern

STUDENT	PRIMARY CONCERN	SECONDARY CONCERN	TERTIARY CONCERN
1	PEDAGOGICAL	SOCIOCULTURAL	LANGUAGE
2	PEDAGOGICAL	SOCIOCULTURAL	LANGUAGE
3	PEDAGOGICAL	SOCIOCULTURAL	LANGUAGE
4	SOCIOCULTURAL	LANGUAGE	PEDAGOGICAL
5	LANGUAGE	PEDAGOGICAL	SOCIOCULTURAL
6	SOCIOCULTURAL	LANGUAGE	PEDAGOGICAL
7	PEDAGOGICAL	LANGUAGE	SOCIOCULTURAL
8	PEDAGOGICAL	LANGUAGE	SOCIOCULTURAL
9	PEDAGOGICAL	SOCIOCULTURAL	LANGUAGE
10	SOCIOCULTURAL	PEDAGOGICAL	LANGUAGE
11	PEDAGOGICAL	SOCIOCULTURAL	LANGUAGE
12	SOCIOCULTURAL	LANGUAGE	PEDAGOGICAL
13	LANGUAGE	PEDAGOGICAL	SOCIOCULTURAL
14	PEDAGOGICAL	SOCIOCULTURAL	LANGUAGE
15	SOCIOCULTURAL	LANGUAGE	PEDAGOGICAL
16	SOCIOCULTURAL	PEDAGOGICAL	LANGUAGE
17	PEDAGOGICAL	SOCIOCULTURAL	LANGUAGE
18	SOCIOCULTURAL	LANGUAGE	PEDAGOGICAL
19	PEDAGOGICAL	SOCIOCULTURAL	LANGUAGE
20	LANGUAGE	SOCIOCULTURAL	PEDAGOGICAL
21	PEDAGOGICAL	LANGUAGE	SOCIOCULTURAL
22	SOCIOCULTURAL	PEDAGOGICAL	LANGUAGE
23	PEDAGOGICAL	SOCIOCULTURAL	LANGUAGE
24	SOCIOCULTURAL	PEDAGOGICAL	LANGUAGE
25	PEDAGOGICAL	LANGUAGE	SOCIOCULTURAL
26	SOCIOCULTURAL	PEDAGOGICAL	LANGUAGE
27	LANGUAGE	SOCIOCULTURAL	PEDAGOGICAL
28	PEDAGOGICAL	LANGUAGE	SOCIOCULTURAL
29	SOCIOCULTURAL	PEDAGOGICAL	LANGUAGE
30	LANGUAGE	SOCIOCULTURAL	PEDAGOGICAL
31	SOCIOCULTURAL	PEDAGOGICAL	LANGUAGE

TOTALS:

Pedagogical = 14 of 31
Sociocultural = 12 of 31
Language = 5 of 31

Sociocultural = 12 of 31
Language = 10 of 31
Pedagogical = 9 of 31

Language = 16 of 31
Pedagogical = 8 of 31
Sociocultural = 7 of 31

“The tutors here do not understand that much about Chinese people. They really just try to get us to do the work and to get work done on time, that sort of thing”. (Student 7, Intermediate interview, page 5).

This ‘discontent’ had begun to surface during the Initial set of interviews, when eight of the thirty-one students stated that pedagogical differences were their primary concern. However, during the course of the Intermediate interviews, and subsequent to the need to undertake individual project work, this same concern had strongly re-surfaced and now included fourteen of the thirty-one students, thereby making it the primary concern within the intermediate interviews. Student 2 remarked:

“I know what the UK tutors want, but it is whether I want to do it . . . If I do not go back to a tutor again it is because whatever it is they want me to do, I just do not want to do it if I do not feel that it is right for me . . . I need to find out for myself if that is really what I want to do”. (Student 2, Intermediate interview, page 4).

The quotation from Student 2, above, was particularly interesting in that although there was still a feeling of discontent within her comment, it was one of the first to show an awareness for any autonomous thinking. I doubt that Student 2 would have realised but it was one of the earliest statements by any of the students reflecting on the need to develop a more independent thought process. Whatever the reason behind this change, be it frustration with her UK tutors perceived ‘failings’ or an impulsive grasp for more individuality, it was nonetheless an important change. For until now this student had expounded on her Chinese teacher’s guidance throughout her undergraduate years back home and tried to follow that advice in the early stages of her studies in the UK. Maybe the critical thinking and individuality of thought that her UK tutors had been advocating was now becoming less confusing and more acceptable to her? Whatever the reason, significant changes to her educational outlook were now beginning to take place.

Even at this midway point of the student’s two-year MA courses it was still the critical discourse and independence of thought and practice that was the most difficult for the majority of these students to accomplish:

“The most thing I feel different with is the critical discussions here. It is I think the most important part in UK teaching, and we know that discussion is important but maybe, I think listening is much more important than speaking when educating. So why does everybody here speak about everything, they just talk about work, they just speak it and ask peoples’ opinions and they do not ever feel afraid about that. I find it difficult to speak about it, because maybe before at home I think the teaching philosophy was not high enough to have these discussions”. (Student 14, Intermediate interview, page 1).

An additional insight was provided by three of the students when they explained the reluctance of many Chinese students to wholeheartedly commit to the ‘peer critiques’ that had begun in the second term of their first year and are an established part of the teaching approach of art courses in the UK. The reasons for this reluctance to critique others was initially explained by Students 2, 7 and 14 as being a lack of sufficient English language to do justice to their critiquing. However, when pressed a little further it emerged that it had far more to do with their social upbringing than any language difficulties. For it is far from customary in Chinese societies to be directly critical in a protracted face-to-face manner (Hofstede 2001). It is simply not the custom within their society to act in such a way and is considered extremely rude. It was of great interest to note their reticence in describing this to the interviewer, as they would have preferred that their reluctance to critique be explained by their lack of the necessary English language skills. It was as if there was some embarrassment to them in explaining the real reason for their reluctance as being of a cultural nature.

“Sometimes it is hard to understand whether they really like my work, when they discuss it really hard. I kind of get a sense of what they are talking about but I don’t like to hurt people when I talk of others work in crits”. (Student 2, Intermediate interview, page 2).

“It is difficult for us to explain our thoughts and feelings in English, but it is more difficult for us to say bad things to people. We are passive with

Figure 14: Intermediate interviews – Main themes of primary concerns

STUDENT	PRIMARY CONCERN	ILLUSTRATION . . .
1	P	Confusion caused by difference in pedagogy between PRC and UK
2	P	Belief that student is being influenced in the wrong (<i>artistic</i>) direction
3	P	Impression given that UK tutor doesn't care sufficiently about Chinese
4	S	Unease is felt over UK tutor and Chinese student relationships
5	L	Slow progress being made, student unsure what to do or how to do it
6	S	Taking longer than expected to adapt to UK, needs more time
7	P	General feeling that UK teachers do not understand Chinese students
8	P	Dislike of different teachers having different teaching styles
9	P	Everything in UK university is too fast, with too many deadlines
10	S	Difficulty making friends with UK students, but not with internationals
11	P	Belief that Chinese tutors are better prepared than British tutors
12	S	Difficulties outside of university with UK society generally
13	L	Language still a primary concern but adapting slowly and surely
14	P	Statement that there is too much freedom in UK education
15	S	Misunderstandings between tutors and students produce bad feelings
16	S	Puzzlement caused by UK tutor to student relationships
17	P	Confusion why UK tutors make them work things out for themselves
18	S	Question as to why aren't UK teachers more like Chinese teachers
19	P	UK style of teaching is overwhelming while Chinese style is calm
20	L	Language skills improving but continues to stifle any real progress
21	P	Chinese teachers show students how to do things, UK teachers do not
22	S	Personal interaction with UK students is sometimes overpowering
23	P	UK educational principles not being the same as Chinese
24	S	Difficulty making friends with English but not other internationals
25	P	Disagreements over UK examination protocols, too different from PRC
26	S	Negative mind-set developing between students and teachers
27	L	Anxiety over continual slow progress with English language skills
28	P	English assessment procedures different to Chinese procedures
29	S	Difficulty finding girlfriends in the UK who are not from China
30	L	Complaints that tutor's regional accents are not understood
31	S	As language problems subside, other difficulties take their place

KEY to Primary Concerns:

P = Pedagogical differences
[14 of 31 students cited this
as their Primary category]

S = Sociocultural difficulties
[12 of 31 students cited this
as their Primary category]

L = Language problems
[5 of 31 students cited this
as their Primary category]

our disliking and we prefer to say this private. It is not our way to say bad words to their face” (Student 7, Intermediate interview, page 1).

“Back home we did not really take part in those kind of discussions; but in creating the work I was there . . . It didn’t feel necessary to take part in discussions much and I did not take part in many. But here I want to do it, but now I feel my English ability not so good”. (Student 14, Intermediate interview, page 3).

As their courses progressed, more students were beginning to reflect upon their prior experiences and the possible need for change within the Chinese educational system. Several students (numbers 2, 7, 11 and 14) were now becoming outspoken regarding the differences between Chinese and UK pedagogy and the reasons behind it. Student 11 felt that the Chinese educational system, especially in Art and Design, tended to focus on the immediate result rather than on any long term or final objectives. She felt that the deliberate repetition of technique until excellence was achieved, was counter-productive to creativity, which she feels requires spontaneity and freedom of personal expression.

“Chinese are taught different, Chinese teach to focus on improving techniques, not on the overall outcome; but here the UK process makes us really look at all things, researching, developing the outcomes . . . We learn about art in China but we do not do a lot of research and things, we just focus on the teacher and what they want us to do, so it’s a different process . . . but I am learning a lot here, between the teachers and the students the relationship here is a very different one”. (Student 11, Intermediate interview, page 1).

Student 14 was somewhat divided in his reflections when he observed how both the Chinese and the UK educational systems had their strengths and weaknesses and yet how he yearned for the “structure and motivation” of the Chinese system whilst acknowledging that his reason for coming to the UK was to challenge himself and “do different things that are good for me”.

“I think both China and the UK have strengths and weaknesses but maybe I want much more to be in China, I am more familiar with Chinese way of education, though because it is first time to study abroad for me and maybe for me Chinese education style is much more comfortable but the reason why I came here because I want to challenge myself, do different things that are good for me . . . Sometimes I feel that there are too many choices here . . . we can do anything we want to do, and yes I know it is a postgraduate school but sometimes we need more structure and motivation . . . because I used to have it that way in China”. (Student 14, Intermediate interview, page 1).

Student 7 similarly commented on the use of strict frameworks within the Chinese artistic educational system, and how the lack of spontaneity has such a negative impact upon the creativity of Chinese students.

“The way that Asian people, the Asian nations, their creative teaching of students is very strategic. They have more, how do I say, ‘frameworks’ for Art and Design students to follow rather than here which is more spontaneous, and probably better”. (Student 7, Intermediate interview, page 2).

At this mid-point in their educational visit to the UK, Students 2, 7, 11 and 14 were all similarly troubled about one particular issue. They were all aware of the excellent potential that the UK educational system was offering to them, but they still yearned for the more structured pedagogy that they knew and understood back home.

Intermediate interviews: **Sociocultural difficulties**

On examining the Intermediate interview data it was apparent that ‘Sociocultural difficulties’ were the primary concern cited by the second largest number of students (12 of the 31). These difficulties surfaced at a time of adjustment for these students. It was now midway through their two years of study and the excitement and novelty of their new situation was receding, to be replaced by a feeling of uncertainty, they knew things were changing but they were unsure of what the changes would bring.

“I don’t think that I have changed a lot myself since I came here, but my environment, the things around me have changed a lot in the last year, I think that has had effect on me. I felt loneliness at the start of last year and I found out it’s difficult to handle it, I never felt this kind of thing before, but since I come here . . . I was alone. This year there are more Chinese now and they are a good thing, and a bad thing, now I don’t feel that kind of loneliness anymore, but I feel like I am losing my old international friends, my first year friends, because I’m more comfortable talking Chinese and being around these Chinese guys”. (Student 1, Intermediate interview, page 1).

During this Intermediate interview Student 1 was asked whether there was any difference between being with his previous international, but non-Chinese, friends (from the first few months of his UK course) and his new Chinese friends (that he had now associated himself with) and if so what that difference was, he explained:

“Yes, it is quite different, because hanging out with international students during the first year was new, it was fun and just different; but there are always limits in terms of the things that we can share . . . and we couldn’t share everything because we really are too different and wouldn’t understand everything . . . we would always talk about the same thing, just how different we are, about how different kinds of cultures, those subjects we always talk about. It was fun first time, but we kept talking about that kind of stuff, but you can’t talk quickly, because of the different language”. (Student 1, Intermediate interview, page 2).

When asked a follow up question as to what was the difficulty in “*sharing everything*” with non-Chinese students, he responded:

“The first year, it was fun, having international friends was really fun, it was a different experience and it was very exciting, but since I have been here for a long time I miss the culture where I am from. And so, at the beginning of this second year, I’ve been hanging out with only Chinese guys, because I missed them so much . . . we talk in Chinese, which I have missed so much, especially about home and all sorts of

things. It's really easy to make that bond. It is a bond that you cannot have with other international students". (Student 1, Intermediate interview, page 2).

The feeling of loneliness and isolation that was spoken of by Student 1 was now being repeated by others as well (see Figure 14, page 122). It was somewhat surprising that it had not been raised more cogently earlier in the year, but now at this central point in their studies, one year into a two year course, it appears to have become a 'bridging' point where many of the students acknowledged their situations and either forcibly acclimatised themselves to their solitude or made a strategic decision to find a way of changing it. It was a time of choices for the students, a time of development of their 'self' and their individual identities.

"I do not feel like I cannot stand being in this country anymore and I want to go back home, I do not really feel that way actually. I used to feel like that when I was not really used to this place, when I first come here, but not now, now I made myself get used to it, and everything is OK". (Student 3, Intermediate interview, page 5).

"I think it is a little bit of loneliness, you miss your family, friends and food, I think it is a mix of everything . . . It's not so bad that I would fly home irresponsibly . . . you just have to get yourself over it, and time really flies by". (Student 29, Intermediate interview, page 1/2).

An added facet to these feelings of loneliness was commented upon by Student 28 when he spoke of the consequences of isolation involving personal relationships; with specific reference to long-distance affairs with individuals back home in China.

"I had a girlfriend, back in China . . . We broke up because of me missing her; I just couldn't do the loneliness . . . I had to have someone that can be with me, not far away, so we both had a hard time when we broke up . . . there is no answer to loneliness, but hanging around with other Chinese students helped in the end because I meet other girls". (Student 28, Intermediate interview, page 8).

Although all of the students participating in this research were enrolled at the same university they were separated into differing courses classified by artistic discipline (see Figure 5 on page 72). As such the numbers of Chinese students within each course varied enormously according to the discipline involved, and where Chinese students were scarce in number it was in such courses that the problem of isolation was more discernable. So when Student 2, a participant in a ‘Design Interaction’ course, was asked during her interview about loneliness and whether she had many Chinese friends here in the university, she surprisingly replied:

“None that I speak to, we don’t hang around, but I can say all my other friends* are here now, so no I don’t hang around with Chinese. I think it is more like Hi and Bye to friends, they are couples, only three other Chinese in the college who do same course as me, so we do not hang out and if we bump into each other then we just say hello. Once in a very blue moon, actually only once in a whole year, we met up for lunch so that was the only time. I don’t know about them but I don’t hang out with Chinese”. (Student 2, Intermediate interview, page 1).

This comment was contrary to the portrayals given by the majority of the other students. However, it was an important reminder that Chinese students are as different from one another as any other nationality is: they are all individuals, and they are certainly not ‘homogenised’ as some authors have reported (i.e.: Ballard & Clanchy or Redding).

A further aspect of these sociocultural difficulties was the difficulties faced by some of the students when they attempted to build friendships with UK students, or tried to interact within the social life of the university. Many commented upon the difficulties of making friends when they cannot speak the same language. Student 21 stated that although she could make friends with non-Chinese students the depth of their friendship could never be as great as if they both spoke the same language.

* The “other friends” she refers to in her narrative above were international, non-Chinese students who were studying at the same university.

“I think the difference with friends is probably in the language, because while I feel friends to all students, if they do not speak Mandarin, well there is like a big gang of people who do speak Mandarin and that makes a big difference, it is so better because it is like my language, so I think that people who speak Mandarin get to know me a lot better than people who speak English because I could probably not express myself only speaking English, so I think that is very true”. (Student 21, Intermediate interview, page 3).

Student 22 reinforced that same point when she was also asked about making friends with non-Chinese students or at least those who could not speak Mandarin.

“Yeah, because my English not perfect and so it was difficult to make friends at first. So, most my friends are Chinese but also I try to make friends international. But I am Chinese so I feel comfortable with Chinese but I try not to always be with Chinese because my English must get better, or I may fail”. (Student 22, Intermediate interview, page 1).

When asked by the interviewer “what do you mean by ‘I may fail’ ”, she replied:

“If I go home without at least good English I will be seen to have failed . . . by everyone, but especially my father . . . It is because why I study in England, to get better English . . . anyway, I not fail”. (Student 22, Intermediate interview, page 2).

In the example below from Student 29, as well as the language difficulty it appears that the Western attitude to relationships and the casual conversations that accompany them are also seen as different.

“I was told that the English were reserved, but I did not find them to be. At university everybody talks to everybody even if they don’t know that person. But back home, in China, when I talk to someone I believe that I have made a relationship with that person, but here even if I have been talking with some English people, soon as we finish talking they just go, and there is no more relationship after that. Then, if I meet them another time they don’t continue the relationship, it’s finished, there is

no relationship. It is not same way that I make friends”. (Student 29, Intermediate interview, page 6).

“At home I thought I was a lot like Westerners, but when I come here and meet Westerners I think that I am so not like them, I know now that I am completely Asian”. (Student 14, Intermediate interview, page 1).

Intermediate interviews: **Language problems**

The third largest group of students consisted of five of the thirty-one participants, and they indicated that ‘Language problems’ were still their primary concern within this phase of their studies.

Some spoke of their desire to play a part in discussions with their classmates, but felt too self-conscious of their lack of English language skills to do so. This caused considerable distress and feelings of exclusion for some of them. In contrast, the tutors who had recognised the students’ language problems and adopted strategies that actively promoted participation from such individuals were found to have played an important role in boosting students’ confidence and helping them to communicate and engage with their fellow students just as they had always wanted to. Student 11 explained it this way:

“Even when I cannot understand what tutor says, so she explains it even more easy to understand, and that helps me be involved with class”.
(Student 11, Intermediate interview, page 2).

One aspect of language problems that was reported as being particularly problematic for some was when tutors with UK regional accents or dialects, or when tutors from more distant parts of the world, were giving lectures that caused difficulty in understanding.

“Sometimes it is hard to understand when they talk in English that I have never heard before . . . I was told they come from another England but I still do not understand the English that they talk”. (Student 7, Intermediate interview, page 2).

Further problems that were recounted by Students 5, 13, 20, 27 and 30 during their interviews were the tutors' use of slang or vernacular speech, speaking too quickly, and the absence of explanation, or discussion, from tutors to students throughout many of the lectures. The students focus of concern now seemed to have shifted from the generic to the more specific, i.e.: tutors accents, slang and the speed of their delivery during lectures.

“We do not have the very rich words like and stores of words for speaking, English persons sometimes speak too fast and a little bit too noisy and there can be trouble in lectures and classes if there were tutors not speaking, how to say, ordinary English; that is a big problem and much more difficult for us to follow”. (Student 30, Intermediate interview, page 1).

“I think understanding the language is the most difficult part, I guess because people speak too fast, yes that is it; that is my problem. I cannot understand them when they speak too fast, especially in lectures. I cannot listen and understand and take notes because it is too fast”. (Student 5, Intermediate interview, page 6).

According to Student 27 this problem was particularly difficult during larger lectures, whereas in smaller or one-to-one tutorials, problems were less acute and she felt more at ease. One might think that she would be more comfortable being ‘lost’ in a large crowd, but Student 27 states that this was not so, as in larger lectures it was particularly difficult to ask the lecturer to either repeat what they had said, or to ask them to explain what they meant by it. Conversely, in the smaller groupings it was not such a problem and she was far more comfortable when there were less people for her to be self-conscious in front of.

“If the group is small and happy like my elective class then I am more comfortable and so I ask to them what does that mean, but in larger groups there are too many people and as they talk so quickly then I do

not want to, or have the time to do so. I will later learn it from other students instead”. (Student 27, Intermediate interview, page 6).

An interesting comment regarding the usage of English language within education was made by Student 14 when he stated, “all English is not as difficult as the other”. Apparently by this he meant that the reading of English language was easier for him than the writing of it, but the hardest, he stated, was definitely the speaking of English.

“I think recently more comfortable for me is reading English, writing is more hard but compare with reading and speaking maybe I do like reading much more because I can sit and catch-up with the emotions. And writing gives me time to think about it but speaking is too fast to think, you understand immediately or you don’t”. (Student 14, Intermediate interview, pages 2/3).

Student 14 went on to explain how the reading of English language text was comparatively easy for him; he explained that when reading he could use his dictionary and take his time to properly absorb the meaning of the words, even though they were still somewhat foreign to him. Conversely, although the writing of English was more demanding than the reading, it was still comparatively stress-free, as he could usually take the time to reflect on which words would be better in whatever situation. However, when drawn into a discussion with a UK staff member, the student had no time to reflect on the use of each word, or to ponder on the correct grammar of each sentence; he simply had to commit completely to the conversation without any time to think or plan, and this he found extremely stressful.

Stressful situations, such as those commented upon above, by Student 14, echoes previous references by Students 13 and 22 in their Initial interviews, when their inadequate English conversational skills went beyond being a language problem and became interwoven with emotive issues, such as shame and ‘loss of face’ and viewed by some of the students as a personal failure or a public embarrassment for them. Such negative experiences have been known (Hofstede 2001, Tian & Lowe 2009) to

lead students into a personal sense of exclusion from the learning community and even to a complete sense of isolation from fellow students and staff alike. Such marginalisation and power relationships were demonstrated when Students 2 and 20 spoke of their feelings.

“I know a part of me is very conscious while talking in English, very self conscious. I do not really want to say things unless I am sure I know what I am saying is right . . . Because Chinese people look up to Caucasian people because of the skin colour, so they will be well treated if you are a foreigner and we feel like oh you are the best; I do not know why, it is just a mindset, we just look up to western people, I do not know why people look up to foreigners . . . I think what I am trying to say is with being Asian I do not want to say everybody is conscious but I think most of us are self-conscious, we are afraid to make a mistake I guess”. (Student 2, Intermediate interview, page 3/4).

Previously, the vast majority of student comments regarding problems with English language were concerning the speaking of English, however Student 20 also commented on problems with the writing of English language. He explained:

“Because English is not my first language, now I am having problems with my English writing. Before this I never did a lot of writing, so this is first time I ever had to do much . . . I submit my work and my tutor told me she does not want to be hard but it is really bad writing. I said I know it is not good but I do not know how to do it. Then she told me she understood, and she knows my problems, but I feel that she’s laughing at me because I am not like English students . . . I know that she has to be strict with me but I was so upset because I thought oh no am I that bad, I am here doing my Masters and my tutor has told me I write badly and I just feel so discouraged, and don’t feel as if I belong, but I don’t know how to”. (Student 20, Intermediate interview, pages 5/6).

Comments such as those above underline that sharing a language is vital in solidifying friendships and creating networks, as this mutual involvement enables them to express themselves more clearly, thereby feeling closer, leading to ever deeper attachments on all levels.

Overall interpretation of Intermediate interviews

During the 10 months between the Initial and Intermediate interviews, a transference had taken place in the students' primary concern over their experiences. 'Language problems' had shifted from being a primary concern to a tertiary concern in the student rankings, whilst 'Pedagogical differences' and 'Sociocultural difficulties' moved up to primary and secondary concerns respectively (see Figures 9 and 12 on pages 90 and 114 respectively).

“First I could not understand tutors when they are talking, now I do not understand the way they are teaching me”. (Student 18, Intermediate interview, page 4).

The data further showed that the students concerns during their intermediate interviews were merging closer together than during the earlier initial interviews; demonstrating that whilst during the initial part of their visit to the UK the majority of the Chinese students were overwhelming concerned about their English language problems, leading almost to the marginalisation of all other concerns, now during the intermediate part of their course they were more concerned with both pedagogic and sociocultural matters. During the intermediate part of their UK visit the top three concerns remained the same as their initial concerns but merely exchanged hierarchy and drew closer together, in relation to student numbers, thereby indicating that the students concerns were by this stage of their education far less diverse than previously.

Whereas the students' initial shock regarding their inadequate English language skills had kept them pre-occupied at the beginning of their courses, and throughout their initial interviews, it was the disparity in style between the Chinese and UK pedagogies that occupied their thoughts as their studies progressed through to their intermediate interviews.

“I feel great uncertainty for my learning here in UK, as UK tutors will not tell us what is right and what is wrong, they say we must think it through and find it out for ourselves . . . At home, in China, our tutors always helped, they gave out the answers straightaway, but the UK tutors will not, they want us to do it all ourselves”. (Student 12, Intermediate interview, page 3).

Further examination of the data, at this halfway stage, suggested that the greater majority of the adaptation that had so far been achieved had originated from the students themselves, with comparatively little derived from the offices of the tutors or administrators. It was at this point of their two-year visit that some of the students felt their greatest isolation, illustrated by the comment of Student 2 below.

“It is very different from home . . . When I come to the UK I was shocked . . . It is not like Chinese education, because there you are cared for you know, they do everything for you . . . It is just so different here, here they don’t care for us”. (Student 2, Intermediate interview, page 2).

At this mid-point of their postgraduate courses most of the students were aware of the remarkable possibilities that they were being offered in their UK university, but they still felt the pull of the more structured pedagogy that they knew and grew up with back home in China. It will be interesting to discover if or how these Chinese students manage to bring together and align the differences of these two worlds within the last set of interviews of this research study.

Section 3 - Final interviews

Introduction

This final section, whilst following the same structure as the previous two sections, will additionally conclude with an overall interpretation of the findings of all three sets of interviews.

The following three tables (Figures 15 to 17) present the ‘Final’ interview findings of the primary, secondary and tertiary categories of concern of the contributing students. The first of these tables (see Figure 15, page 135) indicates the top three primary concerns of the students from within the Final interview data, and the numbers and percentages linked to each of them. The second table (see Figure 16, page 140) illustrates the three main categories of concern for each student, and denotes the order of importance of these concerns to each individual. The last table (see Figure 17, page 145) presents each student’s separate primary concern, with explanatory theme on an individual basis, and is founded upon the same analytical format as in the previous sections. At the end of section 3, two further tables display all-inclusive guides to the categories of primary concerns (see Figure 18, page 151) and themes of the students

Figure 15: Final interviews – Primary concerns

FINAL INTERVIEWS	
1st concern: Sociocultural difficulties, cited by 15 of the 31 students as their Primary Concern	
Overarching Themes	Everyday difficulties of a sociological or cultural kind. For instance they had trouble making friends with (UK) ‘Home’ students but not so much with (Non-Chinese) international students.
2nd concern: Language problems, cited by 9 of the 31 students as their Primary Concern	
Overarching Themes	The initial problems with language concerns were overcome with time and usage, with communication gradually became easier. However, English humour continued to cause confusion amongst Chinese students.
3rd concern: Pedagogical differences, cited by 7 of the 31 students as their Primary Concern	
Overarching Themes	Troubles reported with dissimilar teaching styles from different tutors. Also difficulties recounted by students regarding disagreements with assessments and differences with examination protocols.

concerns (see Figure 19, page 155) over the entire two years of this study and during all three sets of interviews. These two tables are useful in providing a brief overview of the findings of this chapter.

Analysis of the Final interview data indicated that ‘Sociocultural difficulties’ were the primary concern cited by fifteen of the students. A further nine students cited ‘Language problems’ as their primary concern, whilst the remaining seven indicated ‘Pedagogical differences’ as theirs (see Figure 15, page 135).

Final interviews: **Sociocultural difficulties**

‘Sociocultural difficulties’ were the primary concern of the largest number of students (15 of the 31) as they approached the completion of their two-year programmes of study. The following problem stated by a 24-year-old Chinese male (Student 29) succinctly highlighted the nature of some of their sociocultural concerns.

“I do not think the teachers understand, or even want to know, the troubles we have while we are here. It is so different, so foreign, and is so difficult for us . . . we paid a lot of money to come here but I do not think they worry about us or help us as they should, it is not good value for our money”. (Student 29, Final interview, page 5).

This problem was resolved, at least for this individual student, several weeks later when a devastating situation occurred to him. He had received a telephone call, in the University Administrators office, from his parents in China telling him that his grandfather had just died. This obviously caused much distress for him and the situation was not helped when his parents told him that he should not return home for the funeral but should instead stay in the UK and concentrate on his studies, as “that was what his grandfather would have wanted”. This was shattering news to him and he turned and strode out of the university and was not seen for the remainder of that day. Upon returning the next day, he expected to be rebuked for missing his classes the previous afternoon. Instead, the Dean had heard of his loss and had written him a letter of condolence, including a short piece of poetry, and had left both on the student’s desk. Student 29 explains what happened:

“It was a really difficult time because I was very close with grandfather. I could not go back home because I had money problems, so that day when I got the phone call from my mother, I had a class with the Dean showing his work to us, I tried to be there but I could not, I just wanted to get out. Later I emailed him about my situation and that I could not be there because of the problems and apologised. The next day he left a note on my desk that was a poem about how we really can accept things or not, something like that, and he also left a letter to me and he tried to, how can I say, help me. Before I thought that he was cold, but now it was really an amazing experience and because of that I got involved better, I could do my work better and because of that everything was changed, and I could do more things better from that moment”. (Student No. 29, Final interview, page 7).

A further aspect of these students ‘sociocultural difficulties’ was evidenced by the data that showed that although the internationalising efforts of their university was somewhat successful in promoting contacts and friendships between international students from differing countries, it was far less successful in regard to contacts and friendships between international students and UK domestic students.

“Other international students are much easier to get along with. I understand that British people already have friends and family here, and other countries from Europe they do not have friends here, just like me, so we just get on better”. (Student 14, Final interview, page 5).

“I am curious about other people from different countries and it is nice that I have all these friends from lots of countries, I do like it but I do not know why I have so few English friends. It is very different in China where you just get Chinese, but if you go to a different country, like here you really get people from everywhere. So it is nice to learn by experience and to spend some time with these people, but I would like more English friends”. (Student 2, Final interview, page 3).

Now nearing the conclusion of their two years of study in the UK, it was observed that, in addition to noticeable improvements in their English language proficiency,

the foremost transformation appeared to lie in their improved sense of responsibility and independence, not just in organising the progression of their studies, but also their entire student lives within the UK community. Also revealed from these interviews was the students' motivation and willingness to adjust to the demands of a new living and learning situation within an altered environment, their conscious and reflexive change towards more independent learning and their remarkable adaptability. Students 1 and 14 explained it this way:

“Personal problems are now my biggest issue. Less than the academic things, and doing the practical work, the projects, the designs, that is less of a concern now; it is the personal things, how we relate to each other, how we adjust to life in the college, that is the difficulty . . . the true problem is the personal things, and if I can handle that problem then the academic things are not so difficult”. (Student 1, Final interview, page 3).

“While I have been here I had to do things differently, and I had to keep going when I did not want to. But the important thing for me is that now I have broadened myself and changed to different culture, different system and lots of different people from all other places, with different looks. Sometimes it was upsetting and sometimes I misunderstood but now after I opened my mind, it is a very good experience for me, from now on”. (Student 14, Final interview, page 8/9).

Although the students had been living in the UK for a considerable time, and were gradually growing into both accomplished students and mature individuals, there was still some amongst them who were having genuine difficulties with interpersonal relationships. This had nothing specifically to link it to ‘Chinese in the UK’ type of problems and was more to do with distance relationships in general, which can occur between anyone involved in any kind of emotional separation. Notable amongst these was Student 1 who had previously stated that “personal problems are now my biggest issue” and then further related to the interviewer the evermore intimate details of his private life.

“My problem is not with university things, my problem is with people, I had a girlfriend in China but we broke up when I was to come here, then I met another girl in China, and again we broke up. She was going to come to the UK but we broke up, perhaps because it was to be a distance relationship, it was too hard. I think many Chinese men have the same problems with distance relationships. It is the personal problems that are bigger here and I don’t know why”. (Student 1, Final interview, page 1).

Student 1 continued expanding upon his highly personal experiences, delving increasingly deeply into his sociocultural difficulties with both the Chinese and UK communities, and the cross-relationships between the two. His comment below relates to female Chinese students and how their movement from their home environment provides them with the opportunity for self-discovery on a personal level, and the freedom from cultural and familial expectations that no longer need to inhibit them.

“I could get Chinese girlfriends from students here; when they begin to open their minds, it means that they are more prepared for something that they did not do before that they are doing here, do you know what I mean? It is because of the situation in my country they could not do some behaviours, open-minded behaviours. Here they become more open . . . and when I say that I mean . . . Why do they do it for foreigners but they do not do it for me. I think that is because I am from the same place and because I might know their friends and families”. (Student 1, Final interview, page 1).

Although the above student’s sociocultural experience was on a highly personal and individual level, at the same time other students were pursuing more group or community-orientated sociocultural situations such as social networking. In this case the term ‘social network’ is used in its widest sense, to comprise all of the elements used to build and maintain community relationships, specifically with individuals whose connections to others will lead to advantages, in any way, to one or all participants within the same network. In summary, these social networks could be conceptualised as a ‘community of practice’ (Wenger 1998).

Figure 16: Final interviews – three main categories of concern

STUDENT	PRIMARY CONCERN	SECONDARY CONCERN	TERTIARY CONCERN
1	SOCIOCULTURAL	PEDAGOGICAL	LANGUAGE
2	LANGUAGE	PEDAGOGICAL	SOCIOCULTURAL
3	PEDAGOGICAL	SOCIOCULTURAL	LANGUAGE
4	SOCIOCULTURAL	PEDAGOGICAL	LANGUAGE
5	PEDAGOGICAL	SOCIOCULTURAL	LANGUAGE
6	SOCIOCULTURAL	LANGUAGE	PEDAGOGICAL
7	SOCIOCULTURAL	PEDAGOGICAL	LANGUAGE
8	SOCIOCULTURAL	PEDAGOGICAL	LANGUAGE
9	PEDAGOGICAL	SOCIOCULTURAL	LANGUAGE
10	SOCIOCULTURAL	LANGUAGE	PEDAGOGICAL
11	LANGUAGE	SOCIOCULTURAL	PEDAGOGICAL
12	SOCIOCULTURAL	LANGUAGE	PEDAGOGICAL
13	LANGUAGE	PEDAGOGICAL	SOCIOCULTURAL
14	SOCIOCULTURAL	PEDAGOGICAL	LANGUAGE
15	SOCIOCULTURAL	LANGUAGE	PEDAGOGICAL
16	PEDAGOGICAL	SOCIOCULTURAL	LANGUAGE
17	LANGUAGE	PEDAGOGICAL	SOCIOCULTURAL
18	SOCIOCULTURAL	PEDAGOGICAL	LANGUAGE
19	LANGUAGE	SOCIOCULTURAL	PEDAGOGICAL
20	LANGUAGE	SOCIOCULTURAL	PEDAGOGICAL
21	LANGUAGE	PEDAGOGICAL	SOCIOCULTURAL
22	SOCIOCULTURAL	LANGUAGE	PEDAGOGICAL
23	SOCIOCULTURAL	LANGUAGE	PEDAGOGICAL
24	LANGUAGE	PEDAGOGICAL	SOCIOCULTURAL
25	PEDAGOGICAL	SOCIOCULTURAL	LANGUAGE
26	PEDAGOGICAL	SOCIOCULTURAL	LANGUAGE
27	LANGUAGE	SOCIOCULTURAL	PEDAGOGICAL
28	SOCIOCULTURAL	PEDAGOGICAL	LANGUAGE
29	PEDAGOGICAL	SOCIOCULTURAL	LANGUAGE
30	SOCIOCULTURAL	LANGUAGE	PEDAGOGICAL
31	SOCIOCULTURAL	LANGUAGE	PEDAGOGICAL

TOTALS: Sociocultural = 15 of 31
 Language = 9 of 31
 Pedagogical = 7 of 31

Pedagogical = 12 of 31
 Sociocultural = 11 of 31
 Language = 8 of 31

Language = 14 of 31
 Pedagogical = 12 of 31
 Sociocultural = 5 of 31

The function that was played by social networks within the lives of the students was clearly highlighted in this final set of interviews when various individuals repeatedly focused on the helpful relationships that they had formed within their own closely integrated ‘alliances’. Students 14 and 27 described the academic and social support that was derived from such alliances:

“I have been disappointed by the support from the staff and university. I have more help from my friends, Chinese friends, than from the university. We help each other; it started with collecting lecture notes for my two friends when they missed it. Then we start to study in the library together and soon there were more of us. We support each other better”. (Student 27, Final interview, page 3).

“My friends help me with my work and I help others the same. Some of us are good at some things and another friend is good at something different, so with lots of friends we can know many things”. (Student 14, Final interview, page 4).

It was interesting to note that even though these networks originally grew to assist students with their academic studies, they quickly acquired a further role as an emotional support structure too. This seemed to have come about almost by chance, but in retrospect it now appears to have been completely predictable, for these students, in an unknown country, with an unfamiliar language and unacquainted customs, it was wholly predictable that they would seek out the most basic of human needs, those of comfort and reassurance with others of a similar kind. It is the combination of the emotional and psychological support together with the practical and academic assistance that appears to be such a significant reinforcement factor in these Chinese students’ social networks.

Final interviews: Language problems

‘Language problems’ were now the primary concern of the second largest grouping, which consisted of 9 of the 31 students. The initial problems with language, and communication generally, were gradually being overcome with time, usage and the student’s total engagement within the prevailing English language atmosphere.

However, there were still the occasional problems, and one situation that regularly caused confusion to many of the students (especially Student 17) was the use of English language within a humorous situation, particularly the use of irony, satire or sarcasm.

“Chinese and other students whose English is not good need to try harder, I mean I did. When I went to my first college celebration I could not understand the English at all, there was loud music but I was really shocked and afraid that my English was that bad, I was confused but I tried again, and again, trying to focus on their words. It has been two years of concentrating and it was very tiring every day, but now I can understand them, but not their joking. No, not their humour”. (Student 17, Final interview, page 6).

The comment above mentions the necessity to continually “focus” and “concentrate” when participating in a conversation in a second language. This was also mentioned by Student 13 who stated how exhausting it was conversing in English all of the time. She explained how tiring she found it when having to translate oral speech in her head, prepare an answer in Mandarin, translate that answer back into English, and then communicate that back to the other party. With her thoughts constantly racing back and forth between the Chinese and English languages it was a highly intensive matter that she found incredibly taxing. At the beginning of her studies she stated that it was almost overpowering, however, with the passage of time and the associated improvement in her English language skills she managed to cope with it, until now it has become so well practiced and developed that it is almost second nature to her.

“I needed to translate everything that I want to say into English and my English was not always good and it was very tiring, and it got harder the more tired that I was. I speak Chinese with nature but English with hard work. I have ELT in China but here sometimes I thought my head would burst and maybe it was too much for me; but it wasn’t and I did it and now I am good with it”. (Student 13, Final interview, page 4).

Another point of importance was the element of anxiety that was involved when students came to the realisation that upon arrival in the UK their English language training was inadequate for its required purpose. This was the primary recollection of Student 4, for whom, although now nearing the completion of her two-year course, it was still her key memory from the beginning of her UK university life and contributed to one of the more evocative comments from her third and final interview.

“This time in the UK has made me better to communicate with people. I come here on my own and I think right away that there is no one to help me like home. I knew I was in a very different place, with people who do not know me or understand me. I had to make good friends to be independent here, I was alone and I wanted to go home, but I worked hard to make the right friends and my personal relations got good. The biggest change in my life was getting my ability to communicate well with other people because that made me independent”. (Student 4, Final interview, page 3).

This quote suitably encapsulated Student 4’s entire intercultural experience here in the UK. First came the feeling of disorientation and loss, then the realisation of the necessity for adaptation and transformation if she wished to not only survive but also thrive in this new and unfamiliar environment. By the end of her two-year UK studies Student 4 was coming to the realisation of just how much she had accomplished and she was, quite rightly, proud of what she had achieved.

Student 20 also spoke of the early frustration and embarrassment caused by ‘language shock’ upon his arrival in the UK, and how he was made to feel “like a two-year old” when he first took part in peer critiques and the tutor asked him to explain his thoughts and feelings about his work.

“When the tutor asked my feelings about my art I did not have the words to tell them . . . I was upset and frustrated when I could not explain my own work properly. I felt like a child, maybe two years old, I was angry with myself and then angry with the tutor for shaming me in front of

them all. I hid for long time afterwards until my friend took me to remedial language class. Some did not like them and did not return, but I did and it was good for me and I got better and better during the time . . . Now I explain everything to my tutors and to the students, and I am now a lot better student, lot better”. (Student 20, Final interview, page 4).

Unlike Student 20 above, many of the students disliked the ‘remedial’ English language classes. The title of these classes was offensive to some and disconcerting to many others. Some students, Student 19 amongst them, felt that these classes were of little use and stated that the students would learn better from other students and their surrounding UK environment.

“I don’t think they wanted to learn English from the college, it didn’t seem to help . . . if you do English class for international student who have a poor English they won’t want to say ‘oh my English is poor’ so they don’t go or they don’t do their best. Best is they learn from other students and surroundings”. (Student 19, Final interview, page 2).

A further characteristic that came to light when interviewing Student 19 during these final interviews was the practice by some students of making friendships that were advantageous to them, by utilising other students with language skills that were more advanced than their own, thereby assisting them with any English language concerns.

“At the beginning I make a friend with Mike, and he learned me English, he is a Irish speaker but he is English perfect, he is from south of Ireland, also he sometimes feels alone, the same as me, and he has no friends here even though his English is good. So I became Mike’s friend but sometimes I could not understand what he said but I did ask him again and again, and we did that for a long time. I could not ask a stranger those questions but I could ask him because I had become his friend”. (Student 19, Final interview, page 3).

Figure 17: Final interviews – Main themes of primary concerns

STUDENT	PRIMARY CONCERN	ILLUSTRATION . . .
1	S	UK education going well but now personal problems come to the
2	L	Most language problems being overcome with time and usage
3	P	A better understanding has been reached between student and
4	S	Easier to make international friends than English friends
5	P	Understanding improved, resulting in learning progress speeding
6	S	Student feels at home both inside and outside of university
7	S	Family says that student is more mature than when they arrived
8	S	Fluency in English Language increases prospects worldwide
9	P	Disagreement persists between UK and PRC assessment
10	S	Belief that if you don't drink you cannot socialise with British
11	L	Excitement and pride over new fluent English language skills
12	S	Good positivity about a new understanding of other peoples
13	L	Hard work and determination has overcome all language problems
14	S	Multiple misunderstandings reported with UK members of public
15	S	Previous misunderstandings with UK tutor now amicably resolved
16	P	Still queries difference in teaching styles of UK and Chinese
17	L	Chinese can understand English language but not English humour
18	S	Difference between UK and Chinese tutors now properly
19	L	No language problems within university, but still problems outside
20	L	English language skills have improved noticeably, could be better
21	L	Reading and writing good but spoken language skills still lacking
22	S	Remarkably positive turn-around has occurred within last six
23	S	Past negativity has now been converted into a positive outlook
24	L	After meeting English boyfriend language has improved
25	P	He states that both pedagogies have merit, but China has more merit
26	P	UK 'critical thinking' exercises now accepted as a positive influence
27	L	Language skills improved with corresponding academic improvement
28	S	Positive nature of UK education and UK experience appreciated
29	P	Understanding that UK education will be a key constructive element
30	S	Acceptance of situation brings corresponding contentment
31	S	Additional effort leads to major advance in academic proficiency

KEY to Primary Concerns:

S = Sociocultural difficulties
[15 of 31 students cited this
as their Primary category]

L = Language problems
[9 of 31 students cited this
as their Primary category]

P = Pedagogical differences
[7 of 31 students cited this
as their Primary category]

At this point I asked: “But how do you get to be such close friends in the first place if you couldn’t understand each other? Which came first, the friendship or the language?” Student 19 replied . . .

“If his English was really poor it was going to be a problem, but I think any student who comes here I don’t think their English is that poor. Mike has a English friend and our talk is private . . . and when Mike could not understand the English boy I did not realise that my English had improved so much and that Mike understands me more than the English boy; and that was quite good for me . . . it is much easier for Irish to get close to English people than us, so we need to use such people”. (Student 19, Final interview, page 3).

Although the analysis of the final interview data showed that language problems were the second most important concern of the students (see Figure 15, page 135), with sociocultural difficulties as the first, there is one aspect of language usage that combines these two concerns, and that is the use of ‘sociopragmatic standards’.

These are the social settings placed on language in use and the necessity for second language (2L) users (i.e.: Chinese students in the UK) to understand how that second language relates to everyday social practices and emphasises the importance of allowing sociocultural context into the use of such language.

Therefore, when during her final interview Student 24 remarked how her formal language lessons at school in China had not equipped her for informal conversations or impromptu social situations and certainly not for any casual exchanges of the kind that permeates student life within any UK university, then the importance of such ‘sociopragmatic norms’ was emphasised.

“My English was slow at first, and very proper, but that was the way I was taught. When a boy in my class started to talk to me last year I did not know how to talk back to him properly. I was embarrassed and so I left the room, but he talked to me again, and again, and we became

friends. Now he is my boyfriend and my English is much better because of him". (Student 24, Final interview, page 5).

The quotation above indicates one potential process by which Chinese students within an unfamiliar linguistic and cultural context can gain intercultural communicative competence and acquire sociopragmatic norms, linguistic conventions, cultural scripts and other behaviours that are associated with UK culture.

The one constant throughout most of the student quotations above (Students 4, 13, 17, 20 and 24) was that not only were the students all originally surprised by their English language problem upon arrival in the UK, but that they all overcame this problem with hard work, the passing of time and their inevitable absorption of the inherent English dialect. Students 4, 13, 17, 20 and 24 all spoke with varied degrees of pride in their accomplishment and of how the protracted overcoming of their language problems had been a catalyst of change for them.

Final interviews: **Pedagogical differences**

The evaluation of the Final interview data of the third largest grouping of students (7 of the 31) established that at this point of their studies 'Pedagogical differences' were the primary concern for them. With their two years of study in the UK now nearing completion, it was observed that, in addition to the noticeable improvements in their English language proficiency, one of the foremost transformations appeared to be their pedagogical adaptability. This was shown partly by their sense of responsibility and independence in organising not just the progression of their studies, but also their entire student lives within the unfamiliar environment of their UK university.

Also revealed within their improved pedagogical outlook was their motivation and willingness to adjust to the demands of their learning circumstances, their conscious and unconscious change towards more independent learning and their remarkable adaptability to their ever-changing circumstances throughout the entirety of their stay in the UK.

However, several students (Students 3, 7, 9, 16, 23, 25 and 26) continued to raise concerns about specific aspects of their pedagogical situations, by selecting it as their

primary concern on two of their three sets of interviews (see Figure 18, page 151). Their concerns focussed on disagreements with their UK tutors and administrators regarding the regular UK assessment procedures and the final examination protocols.

“Like the ways of research, the ways of presenting, the ways to process your work, they are all different here, but the way of evaluating our work is very, very different. I think it’s too different, and it should be something like before, the way it was at home, that would be better”.
(Student 16, Final interview, page 2).

This disparity appears to have surfaced mainly because of the stressful situation that these seven students found themselves in with regard to their upcoming final examinations. Some of these students, but particularly Student 9, related how important their examination results were to them, and also how important they were to their families back home in China.

“When I left home my father and mother told me how important my studies were to them, and to the entire family. My father gave me two instructions, one was to learn English very well and the other was to pass my examinations very well. Now I am worried as my English is OK but my examinations worry me very much. What will happen if I do not pass?” (Student 9, Final interview, page 3).

The student’s nervousness appears to have been caused by their perceived lack of direct guidance from their UK tutors. This appears to have its roots in their previous pedagogical experiences back in their homeland (PRC) where the level of tutorial involvement was far greater, as related by Student 16:

“In China, the students have proper support, they are given ideas and then they just interpret the ideas that they are given . . . The class notes are all copied, the readings are all given to them, so there is nothing like that they have to do, all that is done before by the staff. All the students do is turn up and write what they have been told and it will be good. This would be better here”. (Student 16, Final interview, page 2).

From comments such as those above, and below, it has become clear that three of the students (Students 9, 16 and 25) have not wholly accepted the academic acculturation of the “Western norms of critical argumentation”. (Durkin 2008:38). The critical thinking, individual in-depth research, academic writing, and all that is advocated by western educational institutions, appears to have been ‘cherry-picked’ by these three students who have opted for an amalgamated selection of acceptable parts of Western education that can be synergized with the traditional cultural academic values of Chinese education.

“When I graduate and go home I can pay office people to do the research and other paperwork . . . then I can do the important bits. That will make it faster and better so I will be more successful”. (Student 25, Final interview, page 4).

It seems that these three students (Students 9, 16 and 25) have chosen to occupy a middle ground of their own making, a middle ground where they can select the best of both worlds.

“In Chinese language everything is hidden. We don’t need critical arguing, we believe that a higher level of communication is communication without language. You can understand the message behind the words without the arguing that you do here; even with a lot hidden, we can still agree with the message”. (Student 25, Final interview, page 3).

It is not that these students are unable to use patterns of analysis but that they prefer certain patterns to others, for instance diffuse thinking versus specificity (Hampden-Turner & Trompenaars 2000). This mirrors Hofstede’s (1988) claim that maintaining harmony and avoiding offence or confrontation appear to be of greater value and importance than the search for any ‘absolute truth’ via analysis or argumentation (Hofstede 1988).

There was also an acute awareness by the students of how critical analysis could spill over and become counter-productive and even possibly destructive.

“Sometimes in critiques the Western students can be more cynical than critical . . . they say sarcastic things instead of helpful things. They must know that they are hurting the other student when they talk that way but they say it is OK because it is the truth, and they must know it . . . they should be told that they cross the line by the tutors, but they don’t say anything”. (Student 9, Final interview, page 4).

However, from the complete analysis of Students 9, 16 and 25’s interview texts it is apparent that they do appreciate some aspects of critical thinking and argumentation. Their approach to amalgamating their perception of the best elements of Western education with their own traditional educational values shows that what they appear to be rejecting is the confrontational aspect of critical argumentation and its emphasis on an aggressive search for the ‘truth’.

Overall interpretation of all interviews

The analysis of the findings from the Final interviews shows that despite numerous challenges and struggles, all of the participating Chinese students managed to cope with the demands of the learning and living environment of their UK university, and that ultimately allowed them to succeed within their postgraduate programmes of study. The evaluation of their perceptions of their experiences reveals that their learning process spanned a developmental continuum involving them in overcoming emotional tensions arising from changes in their perception, their sense of self and innate sociocultural and educational values (see Figure 19, page 155).

“When I first come here I thought that I knew things and just needed the Western gloss put on my work. But then I found that I really knew nothing and I was so upset I wanted to go home; but I stay and I work hard and even though it took a while I am glad because now I understand things much better”. (Student 4, Final interview, page 5).

As the students two years of study in the UK was nearing completion, it was noticeable that in addition to the evident improvements in their English language

Figure 18: Categories of primary concern across all three sets of interviews

STUDENT	INITIAL INTERVIEWS	INTERMEDIATE INTERVIEWS	FINAL INTERVIEWS
1	LANGUAGE	PEDAGOGICAL	SOCIOCULTURAL
2	LANGUAGE	PEDAGOGICAL	LANGUAGE
3	SOCIOCULTURAL	PEDAGOGICAL	PEDAGOGICAL
4	LANGUAGE	SOCIOCULTURAL	SOCIOCULTURAL
5	SOCIOCULTURAL	LANGUAGE	PEDAGOGICAL
6	LANGUAGE	SOCIOCULTURAL	SOCIOCULTURAL
7	PEDAGOGICAL	PEDAGOGICAL	SOCIOCULTURAL
8	LANGUAGE	PEDAGOGICAL	SOCIOCULTURAL
9	LANGUAGE	PEDAGOGICAL	PEDAGOGICAL
10	LANGUAGE	SOCIOCULTURAL	SOCIOCULTURAL
11	LANGUAGE	PEDAGOGICAL	LANGUAGE
12	LANGUAGE	SOCIOCULTURAL	SOCIOCULTURAL
13	LANGUAGE	LANGUAGE	LANGUAGE
14	LANGUAGE	PEDAGOGICAL	SOCIOCULTURAL
15	PEDAGOGICAL	SOCIOCULTURAL	SOCIOCULTURAL
16	PEDAGOGICAL	SOCIOCULTURAL	PEDAGOGICAL
17	LANGUAGE	PEDAGOGICAL	LANGUAGE
18	PEDAGOGICAL	SOCIOCULTURAL	SOCIOCULTURAL
19	LANGUAGE	PEDAGOGICAL	LANGUAGE
20	LANGUAGE	LANGUAGE	LANGUAGE
21	LANGUAGE	PEDAGOGICAL	LANGUAGE
22	LANGUAGE	SOCIOCULTURAL	SOCIOCULTURAL
23	PEDAGOGICAL	PEDAGOGICAL	SOCIOCULTURAL
24	PEDAGOGICAL	SOCIOCULTURAL	LANGUAGE
25	SOCIOCULTURAL	PEDAGOGICAL	PEDAGOGICAL
26	PEDAGOGICAL	SOCIOCULTURAL	PEDAGOGICAL
27	LANGUAGE	LANGUAGE	LANGUAGE
28	SOCIOCULTURAL	PEDAGOGICAL	SOCIOCULTURAL
29	LANGUAGE	SOCIOCULTURAL	PEDAGOGICAL
30	PEDAGOGICAL	LANGUAGE	SOCIOCULTURAL
31	LANGUAGE	SOCIOCULTURAL	SOCIOCULTURAL

TOTALS:

Language = 19 of 31
 Pedagogical = 8 of 31
 Sociocultural = 4 of 31

Pedagogical = 14 of 31
 Sociocultural = 12 of 31
 Language = 5 of 31

Sociocultural = 15 of 31
 Language = 9 of 31
 Pedagogical = 7 of 31

abilities, the most discernible change appeared to be the return and enhancement of their self-confidence that had been seen to be ebbing away midway through the course. Furthermore, their renewed motivation, willingness to accept and develop new learning circumstances, and their cultivation of independent learning attributes all combined to show the marked changes that had taken place within them by the conclusion of their last term.

“I think being here is good for me, when I saw my mother she said that I had grown a lot and she meant that I was not taller but more independent. I feel like I know more and want to know even more, and more”.
(Student 25, Final interview, page 3).

Upon their first arrival in the UK, the students had been pleasantly surprised by their individual freedom and the openness of both students and staff; however by the mid-point of their two-year course this had given way to feelings of uncertainty as they came to realise that such freedoms could have both favourable and unfavourable results. Consequently, a negative atmosphere slowly started to grow between students and staff that was initiated by the differences in pedagogical outlook between the Chinese and UK educational practices. These students were now becoming confused, and potentially isolated, as an impression of a lack of structure and disorganisation within the university began to grow amongst the students. This impression became a repeated theme, throughout the middle of their two years of study, that some of the students linked to what they perceived as an uncaring attitude from their UK tutors. Some students told of their general feeling of inability to communicate their dissatisfaction to their tutors, thereby leading to a feeling of marginalisation.

“The tutors do not understand us, not just the way we speak but also the way we think and act. They do not help us like they should, they do not earn the money that they get from us, they should be real teachers and show us how to do all these things, they should not make us do it all ourselves . . . they should teach properly, like our other teachers used to do”. (Student 14, Intermediate interview, page 4).

The student commentary above shows that at this mid-point in their two-year courses many of the students were beginning to become uneasy with both the UK teaching staff and their westernised pedagogical approach. Students began to rely more on their own resources or on their Chinese peers, as a voluntary departure from their recognised position of inequality and marginalisation. This would change over time as a slowly but mutually growing understanding would lead the students to the realisation that their tutors did indeed have the same objectives as them, but that they simply had a different way of attaining them.

“I know that the tutors want what is best for us but they do not seem to understand how difficult it is for us, it is very different from before . . . It is getting better now, but we still have to help each other because we do not always know what the tutor wants, but we are becoming better students and understanding more every day”. (Student 2, Intermediate interview, page 3).

The relationship between sociocultural difficulties and the previously mentioned language problems were now most apparent, as when there is difficulty with communication it can exaggerate any other difficulties. The understandable outcome of this was to encourage some of the students to withdraw into their Chinese student community, where of course they faced neither language nor sociocultural problems. This withdrawal into their own communities was beneficial to the students, not only for socialisation and other interaction, but also for mutual support in the face of their perceived indifference from UK tutors, and sometimes even from the host community as well. These students were now adopting terms such as ‘them’ and ‘us’; a separation which they openly admitted was made along ethnic and linguistic lines.

“As time goes by I find that I miss my family and friends more and more, and so I visit Chinese restaurants with Chinese friends. The friends are always good but the food is usually not . . . I can be totally relaxed with my Chinese friends while it can be hard work being with my English friends as I have to concentrate and think all the time, I cannot relax in the same way with them”. (Student 21, Final interview, page 2).

By the time of the Final interviews the students' pedagogical differences and their sociocultural difficulties were beginning to coalesce. The student's problems in accepting the Western pedagogical approach were now beginning to decline and it was the personal sociocultural difficulties that were coming to the fore. One such point of interest was that not only did the students experience sociocultural difficulties within their own immediate university campus but also outside in the wider UK society (see Figure 19, page 155). With these two situations reinforcing each other on a daily basis their impact upon these visiting Chinese students appears to have been considerable. Further analysis of the interview data shows that such consistent marginalisation, and occasionally discrimination, did provoke a counter-effect whereby these students felt a need for reinforcement of their individual self-esteem.

“I think being here studying in this college has affected me a lot in quite a lot of ways but maybe mostly in the way of thinking for myself, I am thinking about the personal me, maybe I also think I started to be more aware about my country too, where I come from, what my culture is compared to all the other different cultures I guess. When you are in a college environment if you want to be different or better than the others, you just have to really try to be different from them and you will be. You are in a different place already so you do not need to think about it, you are already different, you should try to look into yourself more. I think that sort of thing has happened to me, I don't know but as I am seeing and experiencing all the other peoples in the college and in my life here, so yes I think I am becoming very aware of myself and where I come from”. (Student 25, Final interview, page 7/8).

A further point of interest that was uncovered by the data analysis was the difference between the success of relationships between Chinese students and other international (non-Chinese) students, and the comparative lack of successful relations between Chinese students and UK 'home' students. Exactly what this tells us is still unclear, so perhaps this is possibly an area for future research?

Figure 19: Three main concerns and themes across all three sets of interviews

	INITIAL INTERVIEWS	INTERMEDIATE INTERVIEWS	FINAL INTERVIEWS
PRIMARY CONCERNS	Language problems	Pedagogical differences	Sociocultural difficulties
PRIMARY THEMES	Problems of verbal communication with non-Chinese personnel, particularly difficult with tutors. Problems with making friends and finding partners amongst the non-Chinese community.	Methodological differences between Chinese and UK educational instruction causing confusion and unease amongst these students. Some yearn for the previous way of teaching back home in China.	Everyday difficulties of a sociological or cultural kind. Linked with language problems and a general lack of rapport. More difficult making friends with UK students than other non-Chinese International students.
SECONDARY CONCERNS	Pedagogical differences	Sociocultural difficulties	Language problems
SECONDARY THEMES	Difficulty understanding unfamiliar teaching instruction negatively affects learning progress, which was compounded by general misunderstandings with UK educational doctrine.	Misunderstandings produce bad feelings between students and tutors. Students state that UK tutors do not help them as their Chinese tutors used to. Students wonder if it is because the UK tutors “do not like them”.	The initial problems with language concerns are overcome with time and usage. Communication gradually became easier, but some English humour continues to cause confusion.
TERTIARY CONCERNS	Sociocultural difficulties	Language problems	Pedagogical differences
TERTIARY THEMES	Difficulties arise socialising with non-Chinese as connecting on any level is demanding. Also, difficulties with UK public (on many levels) outside of university with professionals – doctors etc. and non-professionals – shop workers etc..	These problems cause uncertainty for some students. They are unsure of not only what to do but also how to do it. Such uncertainty can cause anxiety and possibly some separation from non-Chinese students.	Difficulties reported with dissimilar teaching styles from different tutors. Also difficulties recounted by Chinese students regarding disagreements with assessments and differences with examination protocols.

Summary

This study has focused on the three main categories of concern that the students raised during the interviews. It should however be noted that these were not the only concerns that were mentioned, they were quite simply the ones that were raised the most often and by the greatest number of students. Other concerns were mentioned either as adjuncts to the main ones or merely in a superficial manner, either way the conversations always quickly returned to the three predominant concerns. The other concerns ranged from complex matters such as loneliness or artistic freedom to less contemplative matters such as food and weather, with these other concerns always being transitory in nature.

Themes change over time

Whilst the three main categories of concern remained the same throughout all three sets of interviews (see Figure 19 on page 155) their hierarchical positioning had changed from one set of interviews to the next. It also became clear that the nature or focus of the themes had also altered over time and there was a strong interconnection between some of the themes, especially language problems and sociocultural difficulties.

At the initial set of interviews the order of the three main concerns identified were found to be: Language problems, Pedagogical differences and Sociocultural difficulties. Whilst at the intermediate set they were: Pedagogical differences, Sociocultural difficulties and Language problems. Then at the final set, the order became: Sociocultural difficulties, Language problems and Pedagogical differences. At the same time that these three main concerns were exchanging positions, in terms of their perceived importance, the nature of those concerns were also changing from one set of interviews to another. For example: the concern that students had with language problems changed considerably over the two year duration of their studies.

LANGUAGE PROBLEMS

At the initial interviews in December 2009 a large majority (19 of the 31 students) spoke of their inability to communicate properly in English with their tutors. They described this lack of colloquial English as negatively affecting their initial learning process, their full participation in university life, and their ability to make friends

with non-Chinese speaking students. The following comments of Student 13 are typical:

“I feel so ashamed when the teacher asks me to answer a question because I do not really understand what she wants to tell me, I cannot follow her language. . . so I do not learn. I just go round and round in circle, and I get nowhere” (Student 13, Initial interview, page 5).

By the time of the intermediate interviews in September 2010 the uncertainty caused by their lack of English language skills was still causing anxiety to some students, and also negatively affecting their self-confidence. However the language problem was now more focused upon the inter-relationship amongst students. Specifically it was seen to be causing separation issues to arise between Chinese speaking and non-Chinese speaking students, thereby initiating a potential fracture within the group. As explained below by Student 21:

“It is easy to talk in Chinese for me and people who speak Chinese come closer to me. We can talk of home of family proper, in Chinese, and we know each other better because of it. If it is hard to talk with English I do not enjoy it much so I stay with Chinese people who understand” (Student 21, Intermediate interview, page 3).

With time and usage, the focus on language problems subsided and by the final set of interviews in May 2011 it was no longer the major problem that it once was. The passage of time and the immersion within an English language environment seems to have improved the students colloquial language skills which were now more than adequate for the task.

“At first my English language was not good, I thought it was but it was not. I worked all day and every day and it did not come to me. But when I met my boyfriend it helped as we wanted to talk properly to one and another. So now it is soon time to be gone and now my English is very good and my parents will be happy, but not my boyfriend” (Student 24, Final interview, page 3).

PEDAGOGICAL DIFFERENCES

A similar pattern of the shifting nature of the themes was evident with regard to pedagogical differences. In the initial set of interviews in December 2009 this was a secondary concern of the students (see Figure 19) that focused on contrasting the pedagogical practices used in their present UK course and those used previously in China. As with their concern over language, the students pedagogical differences were a developing affair, where differing features of the problem would evolve over the three sets of interviews during their two year period in the UK. At the initial stage of their visit only eight of the thirty-one students were concerned with pedagogical differences and the confusion and misunderstandings associated with them. However, by the intermediate interviews in September 2010 that number had risen to fourteen. The differences between the two pedagogies were now negatively affecting the students learning progress, and the students were openly speaking of their yearning for a return to the teaching methods of their Chinese homeland. One of the central pedagogical problems for the students at this time was the regular use of critiques, as explained by Student 7:

“It is difficult for us to explain our thoughts and feelings in English, but it is more difficult for us to say bad things to people (*when critiquing*). We are passive with our disliking and we prefer to say this private. It is not our way to say bad words to their face, the teachers cannot understand that we do different” (Student 7, Intermediate interview, page 1).

By the time that the final interviews had arrived in May of 2011 the number of students who were primarily concerned with pedagogical differences had significantly reduced to seven and their acceptance of the differences of the UK pedagogy had for many students been resolved. Nevertheless some disagreements concerning assessment criteria and differences with examination protocols still remained, as indicated by Student 16 below:

“Like the ways of research, the ways of presenting, the ways to process your work, they are all different here, but the way of assessing our work is very different. I think it’s too different, and it should be something like before, the way it was at home” (Student 16, Final interview, page 2).

SOCIOCULTURAL DIFFICULTIES

The last of the three main concerns was found to be sociocultural difficulties. The themes represented by these difficulties at the initial interviews, in December 2009, were established as the students tertiary concern (see Figure 19 on page 155). These sociocultural difficulties were found to be closely related to the students language problems since their social and cross-cultural relationships were dependent upon clear communication which was proving to be problematic. Students 3 and 28 explained how this had caused difficulties for them, not only within the university but also outside amongst the general public:

“I do not think the university or the tutors know the difficulties we have when we come here, it is not just the college things going on here, it is everything outside that is difficult as well, with shopping and talking to those shop people . . . do you think those people like us being here?” (Student 3, Initial interview, page 3).

“The whole system, the health system and everything, is all different. So I am like where should I find a doctor, and so I don’t really find one; and then people say go to NHS and get a GP, what is a GP anyway, what should I do to get one, where do I get the paperwork . . . they say just come back another time and I am like, yeah. It’s difficult to know what their words mean, trying to find things and build a life here”. (Student 28, Initial interview, page 4).

In September 2010, during the intermediate interviews, the students secondary concern of sociocultural difficulties became allied with pedagogical differences when Students 2, 12, 14 and 16 queried why the tutors regarded them as they did:

“It is very different from home . . . When I come to the UK I was shocked . . . It is not like Chinese education, because there you are cared for you know, they do everything for you . . . It is just so different here, here they don’t care for us” (Student 2, Intermediate interview, page 2).

“Why don’t the tutors like Chinese students? The tutors here just try to get us to do the work that they should do, and they don’t help us like they should do. Before it was all done for us, now we have to do everything ourselves” (Student 14, Intermediate interview, page 5).

However, as the final interviews came around, in May 2011, the earlier difficulties between students and staff had now given way to an improved understanding between them. Nevertheless, differences still remained over examination protocols and assessment criteria when the students maintained their preference for the Chinese way of appraisal and evaluation.

A further sociocultural difficulty that was uncovered at this time, revealed by fifteen of the students, was how they were finding it challenging making friends and socialising with UK home students, whereas such difficulties were less evident with (non-Chinese) international students. These same Chinese students also suggested some potential reasons for this, including the possibility that UK students already had plenty of friends and were not willing to put in the extra effort needed with the language differential. Conversely, the international students typically wanted to make new friends and were already assuming the extra effort required with new languages. In short, international students were prepared to try harder and were more understanding of the difficulties of speaking in a foreign language.

“International students talk English slowly and they want you to understand, they work harder to make you understand. So I talk better with them than English students”. (Student 7, Initial interview, page 5).

The evidence that has been detailed here shows the way that student concerns and themes were related. It also illustrates how these concerns and themes had changed and developed throughout the duration of the students stay in the UK. This was a particularly important finding of this research and highlighted how these concerns were connected with each other and how the themes were interconnected.

In summary, the three categories of concern stayed the same throughout the two years of their courses, but the order of importance of these concerns, and their themes, had changed as the students' experience and concerns had evolved throughout their stay in the UK.

This was a significant finding that underlined the importance of these specific concerns to these students, whilst also signifying how the interchanging of the hierarchy of these major concerns reflected the fluctuating focus of these students' academic application throughout their two years of study within the UK educational system.

CHAPTER 5

REFLECTIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

This final chapter summarises and reflects upon this entire research study, including the answers to the two research questions that the study had set out to address. It begins with a description of the background circumstances of the study and continues with an explanation of the importance of this research. Also, it will contextualise discussion of aspects of the research findings that identify and emphasise their significance and their link to past literature. Recommendations will follow, with suggestions for further research before ending with a final comment.

Background circumstances

Various studies have shown that international students commonly encounter problems in adjusting to new societal environments that are outside of their usual experience (Marginson, Nyland, Sawir & Forbes-Mewett 2010, Ryan & Slethaug 2010, Stiasny 2011, Radclyffe-Thomas 2014). These problems can form formidable barriers to the success of such students in both the academic and social realms. A number of other authors (e.g. Singh 2009 and Vickers & Zeng 2010) have further claimed that Chinese students have specifically, due to the characteristics of either their East Asian culture, Confucian philosophy or communist ideology been described as facing even greater challenges when coming to live and study within Western society. As such the purpose of this research was to examine the challenges faced by a selected grouping of Chinese students, and to identify and analyse their perceptions of their lived experiences whilst they followed their postgraduate courses in Art and Design (A&D). With this research being undertaken within a university status college, that exclusively taught postgraduate Art and Design, it was not possible to undertake a comparison study between such A&D students and others from differing disciplines. Therefore although this study did specifically research Art & Design students it was not in anyway a comparison study with other disciplines. It was purely a compendium and analysis of experiences and concerns of postgraduate students from China studying within a creative art and design environment in the UK.

Importance of this research

There were various elements to the importance of this research. The first being that certain strands within the more traditional literature repeatedly and inaccurately positions Western and Chinese education systems, and their students, in terms of being binary opposites (e.g.: Hofstede 1986, Ballard & Clanchy 1997) thereby opening up Western and Chinese relationships to the possibility of being founded upon crude dichotomies and misconceptions. For example, where Westerners are described as individualistic, the Chinese are described as conformist. Or, if Westerners are called adversarial then the Chinese are called harmonious. This study tries to avoid such labelling and stereotyping, as they are unhelpful and as such should be contested wherever possible. Therefore, the detail that the findings from this thesis challenges the traditional literature describing Western and Chinese students as being binary opposites is of significance within the context of cross-cultural education. Cultural explanations have historically been used to analyse and describe the experiences of Chinese students within various educational situations. Due to such cultural categorisation it is important that the findings from this thesis help to explain why such stereotypes can be misleading. For example, the picture that has often been painted of Chinese or Confucian learners was a caricature of rote learning, memorisation and passivity (e.g.: Redding 1990, Ballard & Clanchy 1997). However, China as a nation, has recently been changing at an increasingly fast pace and likewise their educational system, and what may have been true just a few years ago is now very different (Singh 2009). When negative descriptions and interpretations are attached to international students in general, and to Chinese students in particular, teaching staff can sometimes see such students as bearers of problems rather than bearers of culture (Ballard & Clanchy 1997). These perceived deficits, whether based upon language or societal issues, are often remedied by teachers through front-loading or add-on programmes rather than by any fundamental reviewing of course curriculums (Ryan & Slethaug 2010). Such an approach takes away any responsibility from teachers and ostensibly refers it to others (Eraut 2000, Freeman 2002). This negation of responsibility is made emotionally possible for the teachers because of their association of a lack of language proficiency and creativity with a lack of ability, thereby relieving themselves from facing the more complex reality. This reality, evidenced in the

findings from this research study, shows that Chinese students are by no means homogenous and have not only varied conceptions and concerns but also the ability to change and adapt to multiple diverse situations.

The second element of importance of this research is its longitudinal nature. This is important as previous studies regarding the experiences of Chinese students in Western universities were often of a short-term or a one-off nature, usually only focusing upon undergraduates and mainly using surveys as their method of data collection. Such studies may give an informative glimpse of students' academic or social experiences at a single point in time, but these studies by their very nature are unable to show the comprehensive changes that students experience over time during an extended period of study. In contrast, this research study collected data at three equidistant points throughout the two-year period of students' studies, thereby obtaining data that allowed an analysis of how students concerns developed, progressed and even changed over time.

A third element of importance was the pronounced lack of literature written with the creative aspect of a student's education as its principal focus. This is of growing importance with the numbers of international students enrolled specifically within Art and Design educational courses in UK universities increasing (see Appendix 1). Most studies on international students have focussed on learners studying more traditional academic subjects, such as Economics, Science or Mathematics, where the nature of knowledge is more fixed and established. Within the creative world of Art and Design, however, not only do value judgements change with time but are correspondingly unpredictable. Consequently, multiple variations of opinion, or judgement, are not only acceptable but are often sought after. There are also certain Eastern authors (Ng 2001, Wu 2005, Cheng 2005) who write of a basic conflict between creativity and conformity amongst Asian students. For example Wu states that the "education policy and practice in almost every Chinese society neglect and/or discourage students' exploration and independent thinking, intrinsic motivation and other factors that are conducive to creativity" (Wu 2005:169).

The fourth and last element of importance was the possible pedagogic shock-effect to Chinese students whereby their previously well-known and well-understood teaching

and learning approaches, used in their homeland, were suddenly no longer relevant within their new UK environment. In place of these were completely new sets of contexts that were neither known nor understood by them.

Research questions answered

Two research questions were posed to identify and record the changing experiences and concerns of visiting Chinese students throughout the full two years of their UK postgraduate programmes of study within the creative arts. These questions were:

Question 1: *“What are the experiences and concerns of Chinese students studying within postgraduate creative programmes in a UK university environment?”*

Question 2: *“How do these experiences and concerns change throughout their two-year course?”*

An interview protocol was developed which allowed me to pursue the changing experiences and concerns of these students. Accordingly, using this protocol, three interviews were undertaken with each of the 31 individuals, to identify the issues that concerned each of them and to see how their experiences of those concerns changed during the two years of their studies.

INITIAL SET OF INTERVIEWS

Through meticulous thematic analysis three categories of concern were identified from the recorded data of the initial set of interviews, these were in order of primacy:

First concern: Language problems. A large proportion of the individual students were having problems understanding what was being said to them by their UK tutors, which was becoming increasingly problematic as the start of their university courses progressed. However, this was not the primary concern of all the respondents as some reported pedagogic and sociocultural issues as their primary concerns.

Second concern: Pedagogical differences. These were the differences that some students reported experiencing between the teaching practices used in their UK university and those that they were previously familiar with in the GCR.

Third concern: Sociocultural difficulties. Some individuals experienced difficulties, on a sociocultural level, within their new UK surroundings. These were clearly noticeable but were considered by most of the students to be of lesser concern at this point in time.

During this set of initial interviews it soon became apparent that a majority (19 of the 31) of participating students perceived English language-related problems as their foremost concern (see page 90). It would later become evident that this concern was allied to an atmosphere of insecurity and confusion that gradually began to develop amongst some of the individuals, with them viewing this as a personal inadequacy and a negative public statement of their abilities (see page 86). This loss of self-assurance seemed to have a direct deflationary effect upon some of their initial enthusiasm with their new UK surroundings. Their perceived lack of English language skills was not only seen by them as a significant practical difficulty but had now gone beyond a language problem and become interwoven with emotional issues such as shame and 'loss of face' (see page 85). Such negative experiences contributed to some of them developing a feeling of rejection from the entire learning community; for example Students 13 and 22 stated that they were 'ashamed' and 'embarrassed' by their lack of English language skills (see pages 85 and 87). Hofstede (2001) would have undoubtedly claimed that the explanation for this was rooted deep in the Confucian traditions of Chinese society with its emphasis on appropriateness and harmony. This could be seen to be at variance with the more westernised appreciation of individualised abilities and unconventionality. Nevertheless, it was increasingly becoming evident from the analysis of the initial interviews that the lack of proficiency in idiomatic English was presenting many individuals (19 of the 31) with noticeable difficulties in their studies. With inter-communication, between students and staff, being a basic and essential expectation of their programme it was clear that this problem would need to be approached as a combined undertaking between the university, the teaching staff and the students involved. Not simply a problem for the individual Chinese students to solve on their own.

For instance, in the initial set of interviews these individuals (19 of the 31) stated that their main concern was that they had problems understanding what was being said to them by their tutors. This arose because of the necessity in their UK university for all

students to use the English language throughout their studies and the not surprising difficulty that many of the Chinese students were having in meeting this condition. The students concern had arisen even though they had arrived in the UK with TOEFL and IELTS certificates proclaiming that their level of proficiency in the English language was more than sufficient to complete their chosen UK university courses. This deficiency with the English language was now looking as though it could become problematic, and was understandably causing consternation amongst the individuals involved. However, over time and with determined practice and perseverance it was recorded that the participating students all managed to overcome their initial English idiomatic language problems and continued onwards to succeed with their UK studies.

The students' second concern as evidenced by the Initial interviews (8 of the 31 students) was the differences between the pedagogies that they previously knew and their subsequent UK pedagogy. This was followed by their third concern (4 of the 31 students) which was the sociocultural difficulties that they were having within their new UK environments.

INTERMEDIATE SET OF INTERVIEWS

By the time of the intermediate set of interviews, in the middle of their two-year courses, the students concerns had remained the same but the positioning of them had changed. Their first concern (14 of the 31 individuals) was now pedagogical differences, their second was sociocultural difficulties (12 of the 31) and their third was language problems (5 of the 31).

First concern: Pedagogical differences. The methodological differences between Chinese and UK educational instruction was causing confusion and unease amongst the individual students.

Second concern: Sociocultural difficulties. Some misunderstandings between students and tutors begin to produce bad feelings. The students stated that the tutors didn't help them like their tutors used to back home in GCR. The students wondered if it was because the UK tutors did not like them that they were being treated as they were?

Third concern: Language problems. The students language problems caused uncertainty for them. They were unsure of what to do and how to do it because of miscommunication with staff. This caused a lack of progress amongst some of them.

At this set of interviews it was revealed that pedagogical differences were now the concern that worried the largest number of students. According to the students it was not that they had such great difficulty understanding that the UK pedagogy was different to what they had previously known, but that it was difficult for them to understand why it had to be so different. The students also felt that this ‘difference’ was not only between the two pedagogies per se, but also between their previous Chinese teachers and their present UK tutors. This was explained by Student 3 when he stated:

“Chinese education is well ordered, but Western education is less so. Things worked well before but not so here, now it is difficult we need to do everything ourselves, teachers are less, so it is harder. Why does it have to be so, why can it not be like before”. (Student 3).

Originally, upon their arrival in the UK, Chinese students were pleasantly surprised by the individual freedom of action and thought that was immediately available to them at an academic level. This later gave way to a feeling of uncertainty when they came to realise that this freedom was a ‘double edged sword’, insofar as they now had to take the initiative in organising their own way of working, their schedules and especially their own research. Some individuals were confused by this and eventually asked if it was because the tutors did not want to do the work, or perhaps that the tutors simply did not like them. Though, when given the justification that the tutors were attempting to instil independence of thought and action as a precursor to the introduction of critical thinking, it seemed to cause even further confusion to them. This expectation, from the UK tutors, that a student needed to adopt a critical thinking approach was to become an ongoing and evolving problem that would resurface later in the course.

Consequently, some students were left with the impression of a lack of structure and disorganisation within the teaching provision that they were receiving in the UK. A

recurring theme began to emerge when some students perceived this as an uncaring attitude from their UK tutors. It appeared that there was a growing potential for some students to disassociate themselves from their tutors and to thereby withdraw from any meaningful interaction with them. Several individuals spoke of their general feeling of being unable to communicate their dissatisfaction to these same tutors, which in turn led a few of them to a shared feeling of being marginalised. The students' perceived there was indifference from the teaching staff and this resulted in the distancing of some students from the tutors, thereby further diminishing the teaching and learning process. At this stage of their courses, some of the students were beginning to become unsettled with the UK tutors and their teaching style and approach. This changed over a lengthy period of time, as a slow but growing understanding led the students to the realisation that their tutors did indeed have the same objectives as themselves, but they simply had a different way of attaining them. This did take some time, but over almost eight months an appreciative understanding seemed to gradually emerge with regard to pedagogical matters, whereby tutors would eventually be perceived as being supportive and interested in student achievements which thereby improved student engagement with the course.

FINAL SET OF INTERVIEWS

In the final set of interviews, near the end of their two-year course, the same three concerns still dominated; however once again their ranking order had changed. Their main concern (15 of the 31 students) now related to sociocultural difficulties, with language problems (9 of the 31) as their second concern. The third concern (7 of the 31) was now the pedagogical differences between the Chinese and UK teaching methods.

First concern: Sociocultural difficulties. Everyday difficulties of a sociological or cultural kind were now being reported by the students (15 of the 31). For example they reported difficulty making friends with UK students but not so much with other international (non-Chinese) students, this they attributed to 'sociocultural' difficulties.

Second concern: Language problems. The initial problems with language concerns were being overcome with time and usage, with communication gradually

becoming easier. However, English slang and the associated humour continued to cause confusion amongst some Chinese individuals.

Third concern: Pedagogical differences. Troubles were reported with dissimilar teaching styles being used by different tutors. Also difficulties have been recounted by students who have disagreed with some of the UK tutors administrative assessments. There has also been some ‘misunderstandings’ over UK examination protocols that some Chinese individuals have not understood, nor have they agreed with them.

With regard to the ‘sociocultural difficulties’ that are discussed above, a connection between them and the previously mentioned ‘language problems’ was now becoming more apparent, as when there are any difficulties with verbal communication it simply exaggerates all other difficulties when attempting social cooperation of any kind. The understandable outcome of this difficult interaction with non-Chinese (Mandarin) speaking individuals, was to encourage some of them to retreat deeper into the Chinese student community, where they faced no such language problems. Their initial efforts to mix with students from other cultures had been less than successful, mainly due to the difficulties with inter-communication. This led some of the participating students to gradually withdraw into their Chinese nationalistic alliances, for socialisation, interaction and for general mutual support in the face of a perceived indifference from their UK tutors, and sometimes from the local UK community as well. These individuals were now thinking in terms of ‘them’ and ‘us’, a separation that they openly admitted was made along ethnic as well as linguistic lines.

When UK tutors attempted to encourage intercultural exchange by bringing the different nationalities together for ‘shared learning’ sessions, this was often unsuccessful. The various groupings had little common background knowledge or skill-sets upon which to base any shared output. For some of the Chinese students this quickly developed into a lack of confidence to engage with native English speakers, which then led to differential power relationships being perceived by some of these students. An interesting by-product of this lack of confidence was that their

identity as ‘being Chinese’ became more important to this group of students. Hofstede recounted a similar situation in 2001 when he wrote of individuals who draw much-needed strength from their personal belief in their cultural status and values (Hofstede 2001:13). This could be a similar situation with the participants of this study, or maybe just an unconscious reaction to the feeling of their loss of self-assurance. Such an emphasis on ‘being Chinese’ became a means to protect their sense of identity and a source of personal power. Their apparent lack of confidence and emphasis on becoming ‘more Chinese’ seemed for some of them to be linked to their perceived diminishing of status. This nationalistic emphasis provided these students with a sense of pride and personal power, but it was at the expense of differentiating and distancing themselves from other students. These same individuals had seemingly created for themselves something of a dichotomy whereby the difficulties that they were having in making friends with other students was possibly pushing them towards greater isolation. Whilst in contrast the ability that they found to easily make friendships with other non-Chinese international students was conceivably drawing them back towards the more centralised and communal areas of international university life.

It should also be noted however, that other concerns were mentioned throughout the duration of the students two years of study (everything from food to the weather), but nonetheless it was always the same three original concerns that the students returned to throughout the course of their studies. This was a significant finding in itself however the variable nature of these three concerns, which rotated hierarchical positions as the student’s studies progressed, was potentially even more interesting.

Discussion

After the completion of two years of extensive research and analysis it was found that with regard to the first research question there were three main areas of concern identified. Their first area of concern was the difficulty of communication that the students had found when trying to use English at the start of their UK university courses, and how surprised they were by this. Their second concern was the pedagogical differences between the teaching methodologies within the UK, and those that they were previously familiar with. Their third concern involved the

sociocultural difficulties they experienced both inside and outside of their UK university.

Regarding the second research question that was posed within this thesis, the student's main concerns of Language, Pedagogy and Sociocultural issues had remained the same over the full length of their two-year courses. However, it was significant that the order of importance of the three concerns had interchanged as the students had progressed through their studies.

Upon further detailed examination of the interviews, the accumulated data suggests that Chinese students are not so different from other visiting international students, unlike statements by authors Redding (1990), Biggs and Watkins (1996), Ballard & Clanchy (1997) (*see Literature Review chapter on page 21*); because this data confirms that these participating Chinese students most dominant concern within their UK studies was their language problems and not cultural problems as purported by many previous authors. This research has established that the core difficulties faced by these students were less of a cultural clash and more of a language, pedagogical and societal-based problem.

Today we are facing new circumstances in the world, with globalisation comes greater movement, fraternisation and cross-cultivation of people. This will result in culture becoming more transient than previous.

Cortazzi & Jin and Biggs & Watkins previous statements (in my Literature Review) about language were true to some degree for some of the students, and the same can be said to be true regarding Gu and Schweisfurth's statements about loneliness and homesickness; there is probably an element of truth in many of the explanations given within the literature review, however none of these adequately explain the complexities that these students faced nor how the intricacies of their situations changed or developed over time. There is no common or simple pattern herein, it changes from time to time and from individual to individual. Those earlier statements, from my Literature Review, are correct about the many diverse influences that can push or pull such students from one situation to another, but we must take great care not to typecast or stereotype these students or to talk of them as

an homogenous grouping, as they are all distinct individuals and should therefore always be treated as such.

For example even though initially language problems were the overriding concern of the majority of students, this concern was not important for all of the students, and although the three main categories of concern had remained the same throughout the duration of the study, the themes within each of those categories had varied considerably over time. Also, very few students had precisely the same problems throughout the course, even of the three students that did and had persistently stated that language problems were their primary concern throughout the initial, intermediate and final interviews; of these three the second student stated differing secondary and tertiary concerns from the first. Whilst the third student stated that she also had differing concerns from the other.

In summary, the data shows that no matter how many students stated that they had a particular concern there were always other students who had differing concerns in some way, or at some other time. In short each student has been shown to be distinct from the other in some way, there are no two that are consistently the same, for they are all individuals and must therefore always be treated as such.

LINK TO PAST LITERATURE

Within the Literature Review, in chapter two, literature regarding Chinese and other international students studying within a transnational setting was reviewed. From this it became clear that a pattern consisting of four connected but varied ‘models’ was evident (see page 23). Each model possessed an interrelating representation of ideas that were developmental in nature, and generally divided into ten-year divisions. Models two, three and four were generally increasingly sympathetic to Chinese students but had a differing emphasis from each other. In contrast, model one was markedly different in that there was little sympathy shown for Chinese students or for the Chinese educational system itself. This study does not claim that these identified models were the only possible interpretations of the literature, but they were the predominant and prevailing approaches for perceiving Chinese students between 1980 to 2010. These four developmental models were then labelled, as shown below, with examples of their associated authors given alongside.

1980s: **The ‘deficiency model’**. Examples: Hofstede, Ballard & Clanchy, Redding.

1990s: **The ‘misconceptions model’**. Examples: Biggs & Watkins, Cortazzi & Jin.

2000s: **The ‘repositioning model’**. Examples: Xu, Gu & Schweisfurth.

2010s: **The ‘individuality model’**. Examples: Ryan, Radclyffe-Thomas.

Whilst it is true that most of the authors cited above would have immediately recognised the participating students three main concerns from this research study, they would probably have done so from very different perspectives. For example Hofstede (1980), Ballard & Clanchy (1985) and Redding (1990) would have identified these three main concerns but they would have ascribed them as due to features within the Chinese national character and culture. Whereas Biggs & Watkins (1996) and Cortazzi & Jin (1997) would have recognised these concerns as evidence that Chinese students are not all ‘homogenised’, and that the longitudinal changes over the course of their studies shows how the students resilience and capacity to modify their learning approach to suit divergent expectations and teaching methods. Meanwhile Xu (2004), Gu (2004) and Schweisfurth (2009) would be reminding us that these findings show how visiting Chinese students can be extremely vulnerable, both separately and together, and how this can lead to a lack of confidence in both academic and social situations. Whilst the research findings from this study do bear out this lack of self-belief it also shows that it is, for many students, transitory in nature. Gu and Schweisfurth (2009) would further remind us that equally as important as the students approach is that of the tutors. This was borne out by the findings of this thesis when it showed potential conflict arising between students and tutors at the early to mid-point of their two-year course, due to misunderstandings concerning their approach to learning. Lastly, both Ryan (2010) and Radclyffe-Thomas (2011) would interpret these findings as demonstrating how complex these cross-cultural educational situations can be and therefore how important it is to emphasise the individuality of each student, from both an educational and a personal standpoint, thereby accentuating the ‘individuality model’ as described in Chapter 2 of this thesis.

Accordingly, what this study clearly demonstrates is that the students did experience significant problems and barriers when they embarked on an overseas postgraduate programme of study. These problems varied from student to student and were inherent in the nature of the Art & Design programmes that relied on a pedagogic approach markedly in contrast to what they were used to. Notably, as the students progressed through their programmes their experiences and concerns changed considerably. Specifically, they had begun with their initial interviews (around December 2009) when their concerns were primarily but not universally about their English language skills being inadequate for their UK university courses and the surprise that this generated. They then progressed through the intermediate interviews (approx. September 2010) with concerns regarding the pedagogical differences that occurred between the student's previous Chinese teaching and their subsequent UK teaching methodology. They concluded with their final interviews (approx. May 2011) during which they described their increasing sociocultural difficulties within their new UK surroundings, both inside their university and outside in the local community.

The claims made by Biggs & Watkins and Cortazzi & Jin regarding Western misconceptions concerning pedagogical differences, between Chinese rote learning and Western critical learning, were also borne out by the findings of this study. However, although there were general similarities in aspirations towards the same goals there were definite disparities in how the students felt that they should be arrived at. Our research identified how students would have preferred far more tangible pedagogical support and far less autonomous study.

Similarly, further claims from Chapter 2 by Xu, Gu and Schweisfurth that international students were primarily affected by sociocultural concerns, including general feelings akin to homesickness, were also evident in our study but these were at their most prevalent only towards the final phase of the course. This study also showed that the majority of participating Chinese students were constantly aware of and mediating between identities and cultural practices within their new university. This caused the students to be more vulnerable, both as individuals and as a group, which left some students in a situation of insecurity and lacking in self-belief.

Finally, given that all the students successfully graduated, the findings of this study corroborate Ryan and Radclyffe-Thomas's observation that Chinese students have an adaptability and resilience when dealing with and resolving problems and barriers that they encounter when studying overseas in unfamiliar environments.

The nature of the dominant primary concerns identified at each set of interviews were by no means universal. For example, a number of students did not identify the dominant primary concern expressed by the majority of students at each stage. Further if we examine the primary concerns of all of the students at each of the interviews there were only three students who identified the same primary concern at every set of interviews, and that was the same for all three students, and that concern was language.

In conclusion, these findings clearly emphasise the need to recognise the individuality of each of the students and to thereby avoid any tendency to assume that they are an homogeneous grouping who experienced the same concerns at each stage of their studies.

Recommendations

Through the detailed analysis of the interview data obtained within this research study, it became evident that specific concerns regarding the participating students' education would need to be addressed. Below I offer several suggestions as to actions which might serve to reduce the concerns that were reported in this study. They are as follows:

LANGUAGE PROBLEMS

From the interview data a number of issues were raised by the students which could potentially be addressed, or at least ameliorated, by the policies and practices of the host institution. From the outset it became apparent (and was supported by multiple student statements) that the participating students foremost initial concern was their problem with the English language, especially idiomatic or colloquial usage. It should be noted however that although the vast majority of the thirty-one students main concerns had changed from one set of interviews to the next there were three students (numbers 13, 20 and 27) whose main concern had never waived

throughout their entire two years of study (and through all three sets of interviews). That concern was English language and their problems associated with it. These problems may have been exacerbated by the use of traditional textbook centred English Language Teaching (ELT) within the educational system of the Peoples Republic of China (PRC). However, this situation might have been improved by the accepting UK university simply raising the IELTS score requirement from 6.5 (with a 6.0 in the Test of Written English) to at least 7.0 for both. By this simple move a large part of the English language difficulties could probably have been reduced. Additionally, I believe that a pre-sessional ‘summer’ school should be considered as a pre-requisite for all attendees with similar language problems. This pre-sessional ELT School should include greater emphasis upon the everyday colloquial or idiomatic form of speaking that occurs within all UK academic contexts. Although it is an obvious necessity for the students to be able to write their dissertations, it is the commonplace English language speaking that will be of the most use to these students in everyday situations, especially an informal scholastic and artistic form of language that occurs in one-to-one or small-unit peer critiques that are prevalent within art education at postgraduate level. Such ‘critical critiquing’ skills would be an undeniable benefit to any student within the creative and innovative environment of a postgraduate art school.

Furthermore, the students’ lack of the right kind of English language skills: specifically the language of critical analysis and commentary, has been shown to heavily impact upon student to staff interaction, intercultural peer co-operation and acculturation (see Chapter 4). This is especially true at the start of their studies when such negative situations can severely impact a student’s learning.

PEDAGOGICAL DIFFERENCES

Whilst evaluating the effect upon the students of the pedagogical differentiation between the Chinese and the UK educational systems it became clear, via analysis of the accumulated data, that students would have benefitted from an earlier exposure to an autonomous learning philosophy thereby enabling these students to progress from traditional teacher-centred to student-centred learning at an earlier opportunity. This could be accomplished by attendance at a pre-sessional ‘summer’ school such as that suggested above for ELT requirements. Indeed, these two different objectives

(language training and pedagogical understanding) could possibly be combined into one 'summer' school course that could be a pre-requisite for all attendees in similar circumstances.

Additionally, during the earlier part of the actual postgraduate course, UK tutors could possibly progress more gradually into their new pedagogic approaches, continually explaining not only what they are doing but also why they are doing it. Clear statements should be made by the teaching staff of not only the planned direction that the student's education will take but also what their expected interactions and outcomes will be. The students will also need to be clearly taught from the outset that acquiring knowledge does not only come from teachers in classrooms but also from their peers, examining online sources, exploring library resources, moreover self-learning in all of its various forms. Indeed, the entire basis upon which the pedagogy of creative programmes in the West are founded needs to be clearly explained to Chinese students at the earliest possible opportunity. This could be provided by a comprehensive induction process specifically designed for use within their chosen artistic discipline, as within the western art world each and every creative environment has its own colloquial English language variations. Furthermore, current yet more advanced Chinese students, or alumni if available, could assist with this process. Hopefully, by such means any pedagogical shock upon their arrival may be dissipated and any misunderstandings explained away before any damage is done to student/teacher or student/university relationships.

Facilitating a self-learning ability is a necessity for such students wishing to adjust to a UK university environment. Developing a learners' autonomy will benefit them enormously, by stimulating their learning motivation, monitoring their own learning and adopting freedom of teaching resources, pedagogical process and activities (Powell 1981). Meanwhile, learning autonomy, as a teaching and learning strategy will enhance the students' learning abilities to master knowledge actively rather than passively and physically. There is also a close relationship between such students' confidence and an ability to learn independently. It correspondingly shows that if academic achievements come from autonomous work by a means of self-learning, the pleasure and the sense of satisfaction will increase students' confidence in future

learning situations, thereby resulting in the facilitation of motivation, creativity and an unquenchable thirst for knowledge.

UK teaching staff should also recognise and encourage the knowledge and skill-sets that Chinese students bring with them when arriving to study in the UK. They are a potential resource for teaching that could be used for the good of all students. A further benefit would be the reassurance and encouragement that would be provided to the Chinese students from this recognition.

SOCIOCULTURAL DIFFICULTIES

Through examining the socio-cultural difficulties that the visiting Chinese students were reporting within the interviews, the data suggests that enhanced diversity training, for all student-facing staff, could help with a considerable proportion of these difficulties. This could include in-depth and extended tuition in all aspects of educational and social inclusiveness, including unconscious bias.

On the part of the students, pre-session classes could be an option to explain and advise all new Chinese students what problems they will likely encounter and how to possibly avoid them. A ‘buddy-system’ could be created, starting from the very first day of the course, between newcomers and any ‘UK-savvy’ students, whether they are Chinese nationals or not. Alongside this system, a better social support structure (at cross-university level) could be set up, perhaps based upon a “Chinese Society” style of organisation. Furthermore, a ‘body’ or an ‘office’ with well-defined and complete responsibility for international students should be installed within each UK university, directly reporting to the Chancellor (or the person in overall charge), thus enabling greater direct administrative advocacy on the students behalf. Thereby, from the standpoint of institutional bureaucracy within universities, this would ensure that international students would be more appropriately represented, with potentially more accompanying resources that could assist such students to thrive within their revitalised and respected university communities.

It needs to be fully understood by everyone that these are not just issues for the Chinese individuals to solve for themselves; this is a situation that requires a unified solution from all of the parties involved. UK universities need to offer greater

understanding and sensitivity alongside a superior linguistic support system, starting on the students very first day and available all-year around, and not to simply offer basic language maintenance classes ‘as and when’ the Administration deems it necessary. These same UK universities also need to offer early or pre-sessional ‘explanatory’ classes to help visiting Chinese students to understand and thereby adjust to the differing pedagogical situations that they will find. Finally, enhanced and specialised cultural awareness training, for all UK university staff that has teaching or pastoral responsibilities for Chinese students, should be immediately undertaken. Only when recommendations such as these are carried out, will it be possible for first time visiting Chinese students to reach their maximum academic potential within their chosen UK educational institutions.

Further research

There exists various subdivisions within any large number of Chinese students. These may be based on individuals differing regional dialects, politics, religion, gender and so on. Therefore, since these elements can also be a deciding factor in students’ difficulties, needs and ambitions, then it is clear that further research upon visiting Chinese students still has potentially many areas left to explore.

Final comment

There is a need for greater honesty and transparency in the internationalising programmes of UK universities. Specifically, a clear distinction must be made between the economic justification for recruiting large numbers of overseas students and the cultural validation that aims to promote intercultural awareness and understanding. A genuine commitment to both economic and cultural rationales is essential. Such implications cover both the social and the academic domain, and in this regard may demand changes to the teaching practices of academic staff to encourage recognition of both the challenges that overseas students face and the positive contribution that such students make to a genuine international learning environment. With the passage of time and the increasing numbers of Chinese students it must be understood by now that such students do not bring ‘problems’ to the UK but instead they vastly enrich the universities within which they visit. The learning process of all students is thereby supplemented and enhanced by their presence and participation. The differentiation between the Chinese and UK

educational systems have empowered these students with sets of divergent skills and a differing knowledge base that makes them of particular value to the UK university that they visit.

As for myself, I started this 'transformative journey within a thesis' from a rather culturalist perspective, which at that time was very much the prevailing view amongst the staff at the educational establishment where I worked. I was confident in my own mind that the visiting Chinese students were suffering from a kind of culture shock and deficit that must surely cause them to be greatly disadvantaged within the UK educational system. However, with the passing of time and what I have learnt through this longitudinal research project, I came to realise that the difficulties experienced by these students was not due primarily to the traditionally supposed culture shock, which the majority of students actually handled quite well; instead, the research uncovered that the main difficulty of most students was due to greater than expected language problems, pedagogical differences and sociocultural difficulties. This caused me to re-evaluate my own position, over a lengthy period of time, and I am now inclined towards a far more progressive stance as an advocate of a curriculum that informs the individual student and not someone's detached notion of the requirements of the class unit.

It is hoped that these findings will facilitate both students and staff to negotiate the complex transaction between tutor and student or mentor and trainee, in relation to their own sociocultural interaction and pedagogic practices. The result should be a more mature and cosmopolitan learning environment, leading to an international cultural exchange whose value will increase in proportion to its reciprocal nature.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Numbers of HE Chinese (GCR) students in UK 2009 - 2015

Numbers of postgraduate students domiciled from four specified countries* by domicile and subject of study** 2009/10-2014/15

Country of domicile	Subject of study	Academic year							
		2014/15	2013/14	2012/13	2011/12	2010/11	2009/10		
CHINA	(W100) Fine art	113.52	107.68	85.00	50.50	58.34	53.50		
	(W110) Drawing	2.00	7.00	5.00	0.00	0.00	0.00		
	(W120) Painting	11.00	9.00	6.00	3.00	1.00	0.00		
	(W130) Sculpture	2.00	3.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	0.00		
	(W140) Printmaking	4.00	5.00	6.00	1.00	2.00	2.00		
	(W160) Fine art conservation	2.00	2.00	2.00	2.00	2.00	1.00		
	(W190) Fine art not elsewhere classified	82.00	14.00	13.00	11.00	8.00	5.00		
	(W200) Design studies	543.25	559.41	448.85	407.68	339.56	226.04		
	(W210) Graphic design	118.00	83.00	84.00	52.00	41.00	33.00		
	(W211) Typography	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	4.00	8.00		
	(W212) Multimedia design	9.36	13.68	18.00	14.00	9.00	8.00		
	(W213) Visual communication	128.00	130.00	110.00	103.00	65.00	51.00		
	(W220) Illustration	35.50	54.00	31.50	23.50	16.00	9.00		
	(W230) Clothing/fashion design	419.34	450.84	324.34	243.50	194.00	96.84		
	(W231) Textile design	38.00	32.00	43.00	19.00	13.00	8.00		
	(W240) Industrial/product design	85.00	109.00	96.00	79.00	50.00	41.00		
	(W250) Interior design	79.00	81.00	49.00	39.00	19.00	23.00		
	(W260) Furniture design	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.00		
	(W270) Ceramics design	1.00	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	0.00		
	(W280) Interactive & electronic design	4.33	5.00	14.33	12.50	4.00	3.00		
	(W290) Design studies not elsewhere classified	31.00	25.00	13.00	12.00	13.00	8.00		
	(W600) Cinematics & photography	116.81	108.14	57.20	63.14	54.78	39.81		
	(W610) Moving image techniques	4.20	5.00	3.60	1.80	0.00	5.00		
	(W611) Directing motion pictures	5.00	1.50	1.00	2.00	2.00	2.00		
	(W612) Producing motion pictures	1.70	2.70	9.00	7.60	15.80	22.00		
	(W613) Film & sound recording	2.00	0.50	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00		
	(W614) Visual & audio effects	3.00	1.00	3.00	2.00	0.50	1.50		
	(W615) Animation techniques	23.80	48.20	41.90	27.50	12.00	15.00		
	(W620) Cinematography	2.50	1.50	1.00	0.00	0.00	0.00		
	(W630) History of cinematics & photography	44.00	24.00	20.00	11.00	7.00	0.00		
	(W640) Photography	40.00	29.00	19.00	16.00	12.00	13.00		
	(W690) Cinematics & photography not elsewhere classified	0.00	2.00	1.66	0.66	0.33	4.00		
	(W700) Crafts	6.00	5.00	0.00	0.00	2.00	1.00		
	(W720) Metal crafts	0.00	2.00	3.00	0.00	0.00	0.00		
	(W721) Silversmithing/goldsmithing	3.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00		
	(W770) Glass crafts	4.00	8.00	5.00	8.00	4.00	3.00		
	(W800) Imaginative writing	3.82	2.66	1.33	1.00	2.00	0.33		
	(W810) Scriptwriting	3.50	2.00	3.00	1.00	0.00	0.00		
	(W900) Others in creative arts & design	71.29	65.68	67.76	70.93	46.30	33.32		
	(W990) Creative arts & design not elsewhere classified	0.00	1.00	3.00	0.00	1.00	1.00		
	Other	47461.98	46288.53	43666.55	39984.19	32300.59	26756.50		
China Total		49824.00	48542.00	45502.00	41478.00	33469.00	27583.00		

Country of domicile	Subject of study	Academic year							
		2014/15	2013/14	2012/13	2011/12	2010/11	2009/10		
HONG KONG	(W100) Fine art	13.00	7.00	10.00	10.00	10.00	9.00		
	(W110) Drawing	1.00	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	0.00		
	(W120) Painting	1.00	2.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	0.00		
	(W140) Printmaking	0.00	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	0.00		
	(W160) Fine art conservation	0.00	1.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	0.00		
	(W190) Fine art not elsewhere classified	4.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00		
	(W200) Design studies	9.67	9.00	18.00	25.00	26.00	18.00		
	(W210) Graphic design	1.00	0.00	3.00	2.00	1.00	2.00		
	(W212) Multimedia design	1.00	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	0.00		
	(W213) Visual communication	3.00	2.00	5.00	4.00	7.00	1.00		
	(W220) Illustration	1.00	0.00	2.00	1.00	1.00	3.00		
	(W230) Clothing/fashion design	19.00	22.00	13.50	14.50	15.00	10.67		
	(W231) Textile design	1.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.00		
	(W240) Industrial/product design	0.00	1.00	1.00	3.00	9.00	2.00		
	(W250) Interior design	2.00	4.00	0.00	2.00	1.00	0.00		
	(W280) Interactive & electronic design	0.33	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	0.00		
	(W290) Design studies not elsewhere classified	1.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	1.00	0.00		
	(W600) Cinematics & photography	2.00	3.00	4.00	2.00	3.00	4.00		
	(W610) Moving image techniques	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	1.60	0.00		
	(W614) Visual & audio effects	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00		
	(W615) Animation techniques	0.00	0.00	1.00	1.00	0.00	0.00		
	(W630) History of cinematics & photography	0.00	2.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	0.00		
	(W631) History of cinematics	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	1.00	1.00		
	(W640) Photography	1.00	2.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00		
	(W690) Cinematics & photography not elsewhere classified	1.00	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	0.00		
	(W700) Crafts	1.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00		
	(W721) Silversmithing/goldsmithing	1.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00		
	(W800) Imaginative writing	4.00	4.00	2.00	2.00	3.00	3.00		
	(W810) Scriptwriting	0.75	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00		
	(W900) Others in creative arts & design	3.00	2.00	5.30	2.50	2.60	4.00		
	Other	1824.84	1666.00	1687.04	1802.84	1857.80	1975.33		
Hong Kong (Special Administrative Region of China) Total		1958.00	1792.00	1818.00	1933.00	1990.00	2075.00		
MACAO	(W100) Fine art	1.00	1.00	1.00	0.00	2.00	0.00		
	(W190) Fine art not elsewhere classified	1.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00		
	(W200) Design studies	0.00	1.00	2.00	0.00	2.00	1.00		
	(W213) Visual communication	1.00	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	0.00		
	(W220) Illustration	1.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00		
	(W230) Clothing/fashion design	0.00	1.50	0.50	0.00	0.00	0.00		
	(W600) Cinematics & photography	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00		
	(W900) Others in creative arts & design	0.80	0.00	0.00	1.30	0.00	0.00		
	Other	104.20	88.50	79.00	86.70	70.00	79.00		
Macao (Special Administrative Region of China) Total		109.00	94.00	85.00	89.00	76.00	81.00		

Country of domicile	Subject of study	Academic year							
		2014/15	2013/14	2012/13	2011/12	2010/11	2009/10		
TAIWAN	(W100) Fine art	30.00	26.34	16.34	11.33	17.00	22.33		
	(W110) Drawing	0.00	2.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.33		
	(W130) Sculpture	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.33		
	(W160) Fine art conservation	1.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00		
	(W190) Fine art not elsewhere classified	5.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	0.00		
	(W200) Design studies	93.18	120.68	145.18	171.50	169.86	193.18		
	(W210) Graphic design	17.00	27.00	23.00	19.00	9.00	14.00		
	(W211) Typography	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	2.00		
	(W212) Multimedia design	0.00	1.00	3.00	0.00	1.00	2.50		
	(W213) Visual communication	5.00	6.00	4.00	16.00	26.00	17.00		
	(W220) Illustration	27.50	16.50	12.00	7.00	4.00	8.00		
	(W230) Clothing/fashion design	73.67	77.50	57.50	64.50	73.00	72.67		
	(W231) Textile design	6.00	4.00	1.00	7.00	5.00	2.00		
	(W240) Industrial/product design	19.00	23.00	20.00	30.00	20.00	16.00		
	(W250) Interior design	8.00	14.00	14.00	6.00	5.00	11.00		
	(W270) Ceramics design	1.00	1.00	2.00	0.00	0.00	0.00		
	(W280) Interactive & electronic design	4.00	5.00	2.00	0.00	0.00	1.84		
	(W290) Design studies not elsewhere classified	12.00	0.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	0.00		
	(W600) Cinematics & photography	10.33	7.00	6.00	2.83	8.50	12.00		
	(W610) Moving image techniques	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	1.00	1.00		
	(W611) Directing motion pictures	0.00	0.00	0.50	0.00	0.50	0.00		
	(W613) Film & sound recording	0.50	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00		
	(W614) Visual & audio effects	0.00	2.00	0.00	1.00	1.00	0.00		
	(W615) Animation techniques	2.10	3.00	3.00	2.00	3.00	3.00		
	(W630) History of cinematics & photography	1.00	0.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	0.00		
	(W640) Photography	5.00	3.00	5.00	5.00	4.00	1.00		
	(W690) Cinematics & photography not elsewhere classified	1.00	0.00	0.33	0.33	0.00	0.33		
	(W700) Crafts	1.00	1.00	4.00	2.00	4.00	2.00		
	(W721) Silversmithing/goldsmithing	0.00	1.00	2.00	1.00	0.00	0.00		
	(W770) Glass crafts	0.00	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	0.00		
	(W800) Imaginative writing	2.00	2.33	2.00	2.00	2.00	3.00		
	(W810) Scriptwriting	0.00	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	0.00		
	(W900) Others in creative arts & design	22.96	19.81	21.74	32.84	42.55	32.94		
	Other	2463.60	2630.34	2887.42	3039.00	3193.59	3573.54		
Taiwan Total		2891.00	3078.00	3304.00	3499.00	3668.00	4080.00		
GRAND TOTAL (from all four areas)		54782.00	53506.00	50709.00	46999.00	39203.00	33819.00		

Source: HESA Student Record 2009/10-2014/15.

* China, China (Taiwan), Hong Kong and Macao.

** For JACS subject area H Creative Arts & Design listed at 4-digit JACS level, all other subjects grouped.

Appendix 2: Forecast of numbers of HE students coming to the UK

	Country	2005	2010	2015	2020
1	China	26,800	49,100	82,400	130,900
2	Greece	28,000	30,900	23,900	34,800
3	India	8,600	16,500	23,000	29,800
4	Malaysia	10,100	14,700	20,900	28,400
5	Ireland	12,800	14,800	16,500	17,900
6	USA	13,100	14,300	15,400	16,600
7	Germany	13,100	14,400	15,200	15,600
8	France	12,400	13,200	14,000	14,700
9	Hong Kong	9,100	10,600	12,300	14,000
10	Pakistan	2,800	4,800	7,400	11,100
11	Italy	6,000	6,300	6,600	9,800
12	Spain	7,500	8,000	8,400	8,800
13	Nigeria	2,800	4,000	5,600	7,600
14	Taiwan	4,700	5,500	6,400	7,300
15	Japan	6,000	6,300	6,500	6,600
16	Cyprus	4,200	4,900	5,600	6,400
17	Thailand	3,000	3,800	5,100	6,400
18	Singapore	4,200	4,900	5,300	5,800
19	South Korea	2,800	3,300	4,000	5,600
20	Sri Lanka	1,800	2,600	3,800	5,400
21	Kenya	2,800	3,500	4,300	5,200
22	Mauritius	1,900	2,700	3,800	5,000
23	Bangladesh	1,000	2,000	3,300	4,500
24	Canada	3,400	3,800	4,200	4,500
25	Norway	3,700	3,900	4,000	4,300
26	Oman	1,800	2,400	3,200	4,200
27	Sweden	3,800	4,000	4,100	4,200
28	Zimbabwe	1,600	2,100	2,600	3,300
29	Turkey	1,600	2,000	2,600	3,200
30	Indonesia	1,100	1,600	2,200	3,100
31	Saudi Arabia	1,500	1,900	2,500	3,100
32	Uganda	800	1,100	1,800	3,100
33	Mexico	1,700	2,100	2,500	3,000
34	Portugal	2,300	2,500	2,700	2,900
35	Ghana	1,400	1,800	2,300	2,800
36	Netherlands	2,300	2,500	2,600	2,800
37	Belgium	2,400	2,500	2,600	2,700
38	Finland	2,300	2,400	2,500	2,600
39	Botswana	800	1,300	1,800	2,500
40	Israel	1,700	1,900	2,200	2,400
41	Russia	1,600	1,900	2,200	2,400
42	UAE	1,100	1,500	1,800	2,200
43	Brazil	1,200	1,400	1,700	2,100
44	Iran	1,100	1,400	1,700	2,100
45	Tanzania	900	1,300	1,600	2,100
46	Libya	1,100	1,400	1,700	2,000
47	Australia	1,400	1,500	1,700	1,900
48	Denmark	1,700	1,800	1,800	1,900
49	Jordan	1,000	1,200	1,500	1,900
50	Egypt	900	1,100	1,400	1,700

Appendix 3: Research Participant Consent Form – Example

RESEARCH PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM		
<p>Title of Research Project:</p> <p>Name of Researcher:.....</p> <p>Participant Identification Number: <input style="width: 100px; height: 25px;" type="text"/></p> <p style="text-align: right; color: #0070c0;"><i>Please tick boxes</i></p> <p style="text-align: right; color: #0070c0;">↓</p> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> <div style="width: 70%;"> <p>1. I confirm that I have had explained to me all the information about the above research project, and I have had the opportunity to ask any questions that I want to about the project.</p> <p>2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason and without there being any negative consequences. In addition, should I not wish to answer any particular question or questions, I am free to decline.</p> <p>3. I understand that my responses will be kept strictly confidential. I give permission for members of the research team to have access to my anonymous responses. I understand that my name will not be linked with the research materials and I will not be identified or identifiable in the report or reports that result from the research.</p> <p>4. I agree for the data collected from me to be used in future research.</p> <p>5. I agree to take part in the above research project.</p> </div> <div style="width: 25%; text-align: center;"> <input style="width: 50px; height: 30px; margin-bottom: 10px;" type="checkbox"/> <input style="width: 50px; height: 30px; margin-bottom: 10px;" type="checkbox"/> <input style="width: 50px; height: 30px; margin-bottom: 10px;" type="checkbox"/> <input style="width: 50px; height: 30px; margin-bottom: 10px;" type="checkbox"/> <input style="width: 50px; height: 30px; margin-bottom: 10px;" type="checkbox"/> <input style="width: 50px; height: 30px;" type="checkbox"/> </div> </div>		
<p>.....</p> <p>Name of Participant</p>	<p>.....</p> <p>Date</p>	<p>.....</p> <p>Signature</p>
<p>.....</p> <p>Name of Researcher</p> <p><i>To be signed and dated in presence of the participant</i></p>	<p>.....</p> <p>Date</p>	<p>.....</p> <p>Signature</p>
<p>Contact details of Researcher:.....</p> <p><i>NOTE: A fully signed and dated copy of this completed form must be given to the participant, with a further copy filed away in a secure location.</i></p>		
<p>Name of Participant:</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Date:</p>		

Appendix 4: General and Educational Information form – Example

PIN:

GENERAL AND EDUCATIONAL INFORMATION

I would be grateful if you would complete this confidential information sheet, as it will form part of a research project about the experiences of non-UK postgraduate students within UK Higher Education. I am compiling this data as part of my PhD in Education at the Institute of Education, University of London; and it is being carried out with the approval of the Royal College of Art. The completion of this information sheet by you is, of course, entirely voluntary and your anonymity will be assured with no names or identification appearing anywhere within the completed project. I will be pleased to answer any questions that you may wish to ask and the final completed research will be available for you to view.

Signed: Barry John McGowan

General information

- 1 Name
- Gender (Male/Female)
- Home address
-
- Date of Birth..... Place of Birth
- Age Nationality
- Married/Single Any Children
- Religion..... Any Brothers/Sisters
- First Language Other Languages.....
- Are you Dyslexic Any other Learning Issues.....
- Was your childhood spent in the city or the countryside

Educational information

- 2 **Foundation Course**
- Subject(s) studied:
- Year from: Year to:
- Name of institution:.....
- Location (Town & Country only):
- Qualification(s) obtained:
-

3 Undergraduate Course

Subject(s) studied:
 Year from: Year to:
 Name of University:
 Location (Town & Country only):
 Qualification(s) obtained:

4 Postgraduate Course

Subject(s) studied:
 Year from: Year to:
 Name of University:
 Location (Town & Country only):
 Qualification(s) obtained:

IMPORTANT

Please sign this form to show that you are aware of your rights and freely give your consent for this document, and the information upon it, to be used anonymously within the research project that has already been explained to you. If at any time you wish to withdraw your consent you are fully entitled to do so, without any repercussions whatsoever.

Name: Date:

Course: Signature:

Researchers' contact details: Barry McGowan (Telephone 020 7590 4309)

Participant Identification No:

If you wish to give further information, or more clarification is required, please continue on another sheet of paper, sign it, date it and attach it to this one. Thank you.

Appendix 5: Interview Aide-Memoire / Checklist (from Initial interviews)

INITIAL INTERVIEW checklist – a starting point for full exploration

Background & expectations?	CHECKLIST
Which University did you study at before coming to the UK?	
On what course and at what level was that?	
What made you decide to study for a Postgraduate degree? Why abroad?	
Was it your idea to study abroad or were other influences involved?	
What made you specifically choose the UK for your Postgraduate studies?	
How did you select which University to go to in the UK?	
What are your expectations of this university course?	
What are you doing to make these expectations happen?	
What do you believe is expected from you to be <u>academically</u> successful on this course?	
What do you believe is expected from you to be <u>artistically</u> successful on this course? What is the difference between the two, if any?	
Explain what you think will be the main benefits that you will gain from this course?	
What are your personal expectations from visiting the UK itself?	
Do you believe that studying at a UK university will help your career when you return home?	
What do you expect to do after you complete this course – in your career and your life generally?	
How do you think your education here will change you as a student?	
How do you expect living abroad to change you as a person?	
Experiences & concerns?	
What challenges do you think you will face during your course in the UK?	
Do you understand what the tutors, and the university, will require from you while you are studying here?	
Do you think you are prepared for that?	
Do you usually participate in group-work and study-groups, or do you prefer to work and study alone?	
Do you join in after-school activities and team sports, or do you prefer to work and play by yourself?	

Do you always accept what the teacher tells you, or do you check things out for yourself?	
If you do not understand something in class, what will you do about it?	
What is your main objective here in the UK . . . to really excel in this university, or just to pass the exams, get the degree and go home?	
Who will you turn to if you need help with your studies?	
Who will you turn to if you need help with personal problems?	
Are there any questions that you would like to ask me now?	
Is there anything else that you would like to say?	

DURING PERIODS OF SILENCE . . .

“What are you thinking right now?”

FOLLOW-UP QUERIES . . . to elicit further answers

“Tell me more.”

“What makes you think that?”

“In what way does that happen?”

“How does that work?”

“Could that have been done differently?”

“What’s the reason for that?”

Appendix 6: Interview Aide-Memoire / Checklist *(from Intermediate interviews)*

INTERMEDIATE INTERVIEW checklist – *a starting point for full exploration*

<u>Experiences & concerns?</u>	CHECKLIST
In what ways do you find the UK different from your homeland?	
How have you coped with those differences?	
Have you had any personal problems since coming to the UK?	
What have you done about those problems?	
Has your personal / social life changed since you arrived in the UK?	
Have your feelings, outlook or attitudes changed in any way whatsoever?	
What do you feel are the main differences between your education back home and the one that you are receiving here in the UK?	
What effect have these differences had upon you?	
How does the teaching in the UK differ from that of your homeland?	
How are the UK teachers different from those back home?	
Tell me about the academic challenges you have faced since arriving here?	
Have your UK tutors provided enough help and support to you?	
Do you need anything from your course, or your tutors, that you are not receiving at the moment?	
Are there things that you do here in your UK university that you would never do back home in your previous university?	
Are you more involved in classroom activities and group work here than you were previously in your homeland? <i>If so, why?</i>	
Do you take a full and active part in critical discussions here?	
Has this changed from how it used to be previously, back home?	
<u>Coping strategies for such concerns?</u>	
How have you coped with challenges or concerns that you have had here in the UK?	
Have you noticed a change in the style of teaching between your homeland and the UK?	
If so, how has it changed and how have you coped with it?	
Do you believe that you have handled it in the best way? Or where there any alternative ways?	

Have you found your English language skills to be good enough for this course? <i>If not, what have you done to help the situation?</i>	
If you have <u>academic</u> problems here who do you go to for help?	
If you have any <u>personal</u> problems here who do you go to for help?	
Do you have lots of regular friends who you socialise with? <i>(Either inside or outside the university?)</i>	
Is there anyone in particular who you always partner with in class? <i>If so, please explain who and why?</i>	
Have you made many friends amongst students from different cultures or nationalities?	
Do you belong to any clubs or societies . . . anywhere in the UK?	
Do you ever feel homesick? <i>If so what do you do about it?</i>	
Have you ever wondered why you came to the UK? <i>If so, how often?</i>	
Are there any characteristics of your UK University that you would like to change? <i>If so, what and why?</i>	
Can you think of any way that your UK course could be improved?	
Is there anything else that you would like to say?	
Are there any questions that you would like to ask me?	

DURING PERIODS OF SILENCE . . .

“What are you thinking right now?”

FOLLOW-UP QUERIES . . . to elicit further answers

“Tell me more.”

“What makes you think that?”

“In what way does that happen?”

“How does that work?”

“Could that have been done differently?”

“What’s the reason for that?”

Appendix 7: Interview Aide-Memoire / Checklist (from Final interviews)

FINAL INTERVIEW checklist – a starting point for full exploration

Experiences & concerns?	CHECKLIST
How does the UK differ from back home?	
How have you coped with those differences?	
Have you faced any personal problems since coming to the UK?	
How have you coped with those problems?	
Has your social/personal life changed since you arrived here?	
Have your feelings or attitudes changed in any way since you arrived here?	
What are the main differences between your University back home and the one here in the UK?	
What effect has these differences had upon you and your education?	
How does the teaching in the UK differ from that of your homeland?	
Are the teachers here much different?	
Have you faced any academic challenges since arriving at your UK University?	
How have you coped with those challenges?	
How well do your UK tutors support you?	
Do you need anything from your UK course (or your tutors) that you are not getting at the moment?	
What do you do in this college that you would not do back in your home college?	
Has your participation in UK classroom activities and group work changed from how you previously worked before you came here?	
Do you take a full and active part in critical discussions in your UK classrooms?	
Has this changed from your previous university back home?	
If so, how and why?	
Has your basic 'belief system' changed in any way because of your experiences here in the UK?	
If so, in what way?	
Experiences & concerns, have they changed over time?	
Tell me about any challenges or problems that you have had in the UK?	
Has there been a change in the style of teaching between your homeland and the UK?	

If so, how have you adjusted to that?	
Was your English language good enough for this course? <i>If not how and why?</i>	
Do you believe that you have learnt more by coming to the UK, than if you had studied at a postgraduate university in your homeland?	
Do you believe that you ‘managed’ your studies in the best way while here?	
When you had problems here in the UK whom did you turn to for help?	
Did you have regular friends who you socialised with, both inside and outside of the classroom?	
Was there a particular individual who you always ‘partnered’ with in class? <i>If so, please explain who and why?</i>	
Did you make many friends amongst students from different cultures and nationalities?	
Did you join any social clubs or societies here?	
Did you ever feel homesick, was ‘cultural isolation’ a problem for you . . . if so what did you do about it?	
Did you wonder why you ever came to the UK?	
Are there any parts of your UK University that you would like to change?	
If so, what would you change, and why?	
How could your UK course be improved?	
Do you now understand what the tutors were trying to teach you? <i>Do you feel that they succeeded?</i>	
What do you believe was necessary to be <u>academically</u> successful on this course?	
Do you believe anything different was necessary to be <u>artistically</u> successful on this course?	
What do you think are the main benefits that you have received from this course?	
Has coming here helped you to get a good job when you return home?	
What else do you expect to do when you get home?	
How do you think your education here has changed you as a person?	
How do you think that living abroad has changed you, on a more personal level?	
Do you think that you will face any challenges when returning home?	
Is there anything else that you would like to say?	
Are there any questions that you would like to ask me?	

DURING PERIODS OF SILENCE . . .

“What are you thinking right now?”

FOLLOW-UP QUERIES . . . *to elicit further answers*

“Tell me more.”

“What makes you think that?”

“In what way does that happen?”

“How does that work?”

“Could that have been done differently?”

“What’s the reason for that?”

Appendix 8: Blank Field Notes document – Example**FIELD NOTES**

Set of interviews:

Date:

Student identification:

Time:

Location / Context:

Students' demeanour / First impressions:

General notes:

Final comment:

Appendix 9: Verbatim transcript from interview of student – *Example*

Student 1, INITIAL interview on 2/12/09

Interviewer:	First of all I would like to thank you for taking part in this research. Now, can I start by asking you where you studied for your undergraduate degree?
Student:	It was same as here; I did Graphic Design.
Interviewer:	But where was that done? What city or country did you study in?
Student:	In China.
Interviewer:	What influenced you to come to the UK for your Postgraduate Degree?
Student:	The reason why I came here is in not only China but also most Asian countries they are very different from here, they are very strict and very conventional, in the way especially in China and Japan and maybe Korea. Actually I have no idea about those two countries but China, yes. For instance in my College you could not have any real discussions with the senior Students or the Professors because the gap between Professors and Students is really huge. There is no discussion, no conversation even though we are in a learning school it is really difficult, if I say something like I disagree with your idea to one of the Professors, well I just could not do it because of the very strict atmosphere.
Interviewer:	Did none of the Students ever disagree with their tutors?
Student:	No, and we actually call them Professors, even when they are only teachers, but we call them Professors because we feel that we should respect them and do not bother them or discuss with them. With the tutors here there are no differences between us all, they are just tutors and not Professors so we can discuss our work and talk about our projects in a very free atmosphere, but in China I could not do that. When I graduate from my College I made a graduation book and I try to interview the other Students to ask them opinions because they always complain about the old Professors, and their old ways. But when I tried interviewing them, none of them would talk about this.
Interviewer:	They didn't say anything at all?
Student:	No, so it was really, well I just was so sick of this kind of thing.
Interviewer:	So that was why you wanted to travel abroad, but what made you choose the UK and this university in particular?
Student:	I wanted something new.
Interviewer:	When you came to the UK did you find any difference in the style of teaching (long wait) you mentioned the Professors and their students, has there been anything like that here in the UK for example?
Student:	There is a real difference here, especially as I have been working with Nick and one day he said he is not a Teacher he is a tutor who encourages Students rather than teaches them, which is a huge difference. In China all the Professors just try to put themselves into their Students, they try to make their Students follow their example, be like them, it is very different.
Interviewer:	Why do you think that is? Why would the Professors want the students to be like them, to follow their example?
Student:	If you look at a student project in China you can recognise what Professor the Student had in charge of him, and the Colleges can have a certain style depending on the Professor Artist in charge.
Interviewer:	So you can tell which Student has been influenced by which Professor, just by looking at their work?
Student:	Yes, and I heard that is very common thing all over China.

Interviewer:	Did you not want to be like your Professor then? (<i>long wait</i>) Or did you just want to be yourself, to be an individual?
Student:	Yes.
Interviewer:	So, this difference in the style of teaching in the UK, what effect has it had on you, your studying or your work?
Student:	Actually I am still struggling with that issue because I know what I wanted to do before I came here and when I had a tutorial with my tutor a few weeks ago, he said you have too strong an idea and you need to be more open to other things. To try all sorts of different things. I think when I was in China I tried to resist the influence from my Professors so I did not want to be like that and that might be my strength but that may also be my weakness because I have become too strong. Actually I am doing three projects at the same time and one of them that I am making I have no idea what I am doing so I think that is a good experience for me to make me explore something different. Like for one elective I am doing exactly what I want, I think it is good because I can do some very different projects at times.
Interviewer:	Have you found that you need to study or work any differently from before in China? (<i>long wait</i>) Here in the UK do you work differently with different tutors, have you had to change or adapt your learning style?
Student:	It is difficult to say about my certain style, maybe I do not want to be fixed, if you understand, and I want to explore different ways.
Interviewer:	But the way that you work here in the UK, is it very different from the way you worked back in China?
Student:	Absolutely different.
Interviewer:	In what way is it different?
Student:	Personally I think it depends on me rather than any of the staff but I think that the personal thing is different but I can be influenced by other people not just the famous designers or something. With one of the projects that I am doing I try to meet the people outside the College, they have no access to designers or anything, just ordinary people and I try to meet them and talk with them, all of these people are foreigners in London, I try to share common things with them.
Interviewer:	Foreigners? You mean different nationalities, not Chinese?
Student:	Yes, different nationalities and mostly not that rich just walking to the Kebab shop or whatever, so I just document the conversation between us.
Interviewer:	What sort of people are you talking about?
Student:	They are ordinary people. That is what I want to do I think, because they are the people I can only meet in London and not in China, I think I can be influenced by these kind of people, and by artists too. Of course when I had the tutorial with Nick and other tutors they gave to me really good comments in an artistic way but also I want to communicate with other people not just within the Art College, but with ordinary people.
Interviewer:	So are these meetings with all these 'ordinary' people, are they influencing your work here?
Student:	Yes . . . I mean in College . . .
Interviewer:	But how are they influencing your work?
Student:	You mean in College?
Interviewer:	Yes in College or outside. Is their input influencing you, is it coming through into your work for example. (<i>long wait</i>) is it a positive influence?
Student:	Yes, sure the conversations with Students and tutors, which is something I never had before, is really good because I normally work alone and if I work alone it is difficult to decide if this is working or not working.
Interviewer:	So you usually work on your own, not in groups? Why is that?

Student:	Actually I do tend to work alone, but I enjoy group discussions, but I tend to work alone.
Interviewer:	If there are group discussions do you get involved and take an active part? . . . Or do you just sit back and listen?
Student:	Well I find it difficult because English is not my first language and that is one of the most difficult things for me.
Interviewer:	But even with your language difficulties, do you still like to get involved or do you just prefer to listen?
Student:	At home I would have been involved in conversation and sometimes lead the conversation but since I came here I think I just rest a little, I do not just sit on backsides and listen, I do try to get involved in the conversation.
Interviewer:	So this 'not getting involved in conversation' is it a language thing or is it a cultural thing, what do you think?
Student:	I think because sometimes I could not understand what they were talking about and without input I could not say anything but of course the cultural differences are a big thing too, sometimes for me it does not make any sense but they just try to develop a weird idea and that is a thing that I cannot understand.
Interviewer:	So if something happens, or something is said, in class that you do not understand, what do you do about that?
Student:	There are some friends and I ask them after the class what I miss, or did not understand.
Interviewer:	Are they Chinese too?
Student:	No, I am the only Chinese in my class but most are international students from all over Europe. Most of them are not native speakers and they are also foreigners in London too.
Interviewer:	Do you mix well with people from different cultures?
Student:	Yes that is fine but . . . I think mixing with British Students is more difficult than mixing with other international Students. Other Chinese also seem to mix more with international Students than British. British Students have their own culture and really are together, unfortunately I could not understand what they are meaning. But it is not an English language problem, I only think just cultural.
Interviewer:	Why do you think that?
Student:	Well if they are talking about a TV program or film or something then I cannot get in the context, so I have a problem, yes.
Interviewer:	When you mix with other non-Chinese international students, do you have problems then.
Student:	No problems.
Interviewer:	Do you have many non-Chinese friends here?
Student:	Well there are Chinese here in different departments so they are good friends, I just do not have much time for others.
Interviewer:	Do you mix with all the different national groupings . . . UK, internationals, Chinese, everyone?
Student:	That is right.
Interviewer:	OK, do you ever have any problems with homesickness . . . do you know what I mean by homesick?
Student:	Yes and that is the time I start hanging out with Chinese guys, before then I just try to avoid them. I did not want to speak Chinese here but I have been here for a while and sometimes I miss Chinese language and food and everything. I think a few weeks ago maybe I start hanging out with Chinese guys again, but not too much.
Interviewer:	Do you mean socially? Do you go out and have fun together, for instance?
Student:	Yes sometimes.
Interviewer:	Do you also study with them, academically. (long wait) do you study together?

Student:	No we do not study together because we are all of different types of art and design; but sometimes we just meet at one of their places and cook Chinese food but that is all.
Interviewer:	So it is a social situation rather than an academic one?
Student:	Yes.
Interviewer:	Now. moving on, is there anything here at this university that you feel you would like to change in any way?
Student:	Change? . . . What I feel is what everyone is feeling, as you know the Communications Head of Department will change as you know and because I have a graphic design background and when I first came here I was quite surprised, because for me it is more like Art School in my department. Communication Art and Design should be so that Art and Design are equal.
Interviewer:	What do you mean by that?
Student:	For me the art part is much bigger than design and actually many people have criticised that is why the communication department invited Neville Brody, who is a proper Graphic Designer and then now the Head of the Department is who is one of the most famous Graphic Designers, that is the one that I wanted to change but I think it is already being changed.
Interviewer:	OK, but the way that the university is now, the way it works, the tutors and Students and how they interact, do you find all of that OK? . . . Is there anything about it that you would like to change?
Student:	I am happy with that actually. Sometimes Students complain about the system but I do know there are the tutorials on the notice board, so if you want to have many tutorials you can book the tutorials, you can do something if you want but the Students who complain about the system they never book the tutorials or anything. So it is absolutely up to me if I want to do something more I can.
Interviewer:	That is one thing that some of the students have spoken of, they are not used to having to do so much for themselves. What about you, are you OK with it, do you have such problems.
Student:	No. That is one of the reasons why I did not go to America to study. As their kind of schools have too much unnecessary structuring.
Interviewer:	I see.
Student:	I did not want that again because I already had it in China. There are no tutorials in China, you cannot book a tutorial, they only have a class and I must attend the class and it is very boring.
Interviewer:	But if you had any academic problems here at this university who would you turn to for help?
Student:	An academic problem?
Interviewer:	Yes, if you had problems with your studies would you go to your friends, the staff, the administration, who do you feel you could go to for help?
Student:	Well it depends on which kind of problem I have. If I have as you say an academic problem I would go to Mick my tutor, if I have a social problem I would speak to friends.
Interviewer:	So with personal problems you would go to friends, and academic problems you would go to a tutor.
Student:	Yes.
Interviewer:	OK fine. Now what do you think the main benefits are that you will get from this course?
Student:	Main benefits?
Interviewer:	Yes, to you personally.
Student:	Because not only this country, this society, but everything is different for me and for me it is the best chance in my life to express myself, and explore something different. Yes that is the thing and as a Graphic Designer I can get many different visual images and visual stuff I can get

	which I never get in my country and that is the main thing I think. As Nick told me I was quite fixed in myself, here I could try to be more open, they are the main things.
Interviewer:	Do you think your education here in the UK will change you as an artist, as a student or as a person, will it change you in any way? (<i>long wait</i>) If so, how?
Student:	Yes I am changing, I think in a good way, I am always somewhere between an Artist and a Designer, and I do not think the border needs to be clear, it can be mixed up, sometimes I work as a Designer and sometimes as an Artist. Now I am doing six projects and three of them are design work and three of them are artwork and it works well together. I do not think I could do this in China because the most common question I heard in China was are you an Artist or a Designer and they always make me choose one of them. They want to slot me into a pigeonhole, as you say here? Especially my Professors did, they always said if you do not know how to make money you can do this, otherwise you should stop doing this kind of artistic work. I do not think so, I worked in a design studio in China before I came here to London but the interesting thing is that I could do something I really wanted to do because they said in China I could not do it commercially but I did those things for commercial work and the client was really happy with my presentation. So why is it so very different and I feel like when I come back from China I may change the rigid atmosphere and this College will give to me a really good background which means I could do something I could not do if I was a student in China.
Interviewer:	Do you plan on going back to China after you graduate?
Student:	Yes, but in some years maybe in five years time.
Interviewer:	Will having been here help you to get a better job in China, or will it help you with your career when you go back home. In what way will it affect you?
Student:	Yes definitely I may have a power change or something I hope.
Interviewer:	Whilst you have been here in the UK is there anything that has really made a big impression on you, anything special that has happened, either good or bad, that really stands out. Anything that made you say, 'Oh that surprised me, that bothered me or that was really good or that was really bad?' (<i>long wait</i>) Anything?
Student:	I think the critical thinking process; I think that made the most impression on me.
Interviewer:	You mean between the tutors and the Students . . . or between the Students to the Students?
Student:	Between the Students and tutors, like the last group tutorial that we did from 10.00 to 5.00 pm, for seven hours, that was really so long and I was really tired but there were so many good ideas coming out of it, and so many different thoughts, so for me that was a really good, new learning experience.
Interviewer:	With all of the things that the tutors have said to you here, is there anything that has made you profoundly change your 'beliefs' as it were, totally changed your belief system?
Student:	I do not think so, I do not know, this is only the beginning.
Interviewer:	It is still an ongoing process then?
Student:	Yes still ongoing.
Interviewer:	So there is nothing that has completely changed the way you view things?
Student:	Yes, but I do not want to change myself completely!
Interviewer:	Why not?
Student:	Sometimes I see someone who graduates from somewhere and he is a really different person before he went to study abroad and I do not want to

	change myself completely. I just want to keep the essential things, do you understand; I just want to put some more critical stuff in.
Interviewer:	OK. So when you are working with your tutors, here in the UK, do you tend to just accept whatever they tell you? Back in China you said that you had to accept what was being told to you by your Chinese 'Professors'; so now that you are here in the UK do you now feel that you have to accept everything that is told to you. Can you say, for instance, 'oh no that's not right, I do not think that is correct'?
Student:	Yes I think I can.
Interviewer:	OK, so you do feel able to do that?
Student:	Yes, because here it is normal to do that and no one is going to say you should not do that, I feel free to be able to do that now.
Interviewer:	You feel OK to do that? Do you feel that you have any 'influence' in your discussions with tutors?
Student:	I think so, but I do not know them that well yet.
Interviewer:	What about working with other Students, including Chinese, can you have proper open discussions, and even accept them criticising your work and perhaps you criticising theirs in return?
Student:	Yes.
Interviewer:	Do you think that all the Chinese students are OK with that?
Student:	Yes, that is OK, that is one of the different things here, when we had discussions with other Chinese students back home in China we never criticised each other because we think it is rude.
Interviewer:	Do they think it is impolite?
Student:	Sometimes Chinese people are too polite, they never criticise each other's work, which means it is impossible to have a real discussion about it. It is just talk, I just talk about my work and they talk about their work and that is it, no more communicating than that; but here in the UK it is expected for students to criticise other students' work, that is all very normal and very expected . . . but very different in China.
Interviewer:	If they 'criticise' your work now, in a critique say, does that upset you or can you accept it and learn from it?
Student:	Yes of course I do, except for my friend, he can fully understand my work but he is a different person, if something he says makes sense then I can accept it, if not it is different but it is good to hear a different view anyway I think.
Interviewer:	You can accept the fact that he has made his opinion known to you and that is OK by you?
Student:	Yes that is OK.
Interviewer:	Right . . . now, if your tutor tells you something is a fact, do you simply accept it as such or do you go away and check it out later? So, what I am asking is do you ever question what the tutor says is correct?
Student:	Actually for me because I am a Chinese student sometimes my English is not good enough in the critiques and sometimes I need to think about it more, what I do is I email my tutor when I am alone later on, I think that is a good way.
Interviewer:	OK, if that works for you then that is a good way. So if you think of something afterwards, a response or whatever, you just email it to them?
Student:	Yes.
Interviewer:	And do the tutors reply, do they email back?
Student:	Yes, because in critical discussions the conversations are really fast, especially with the British Students, so it is really difficult to follow sometimes; I just listen and try to work it out, or book a personal tutorial later to talk over it again.
Interviewer:	Do you think that is a problem with language or is culture involved in that

	as well, I mean do you feel comfortable joining in with the critical discussions in a group setting?
Student:	Yes that is fine, if I have a personal tutorial afterwards then there is no problem, the tutor sometimes waits for me, to let me think about it, and then I find that the next time I can explain very well in the group discussions, if there are not too many students there.
Interviewer:	So in small groups or in one to one situations the conversation can be slowed down to the speed that you are comfortable with, but in a large group of course you cannot ask a whole crowd to wait for you, so yes I think I see what you mean. But in one to one situations do you have any problems understanding the tutors and what the tutors want from you?
Student:	No.
Interviewer:	OK then. Now, what level of importance do you put onto the actual examination itself? How important is that piece of paper, that degree certificate, to you, or is the learning itself is of more importance?
Student:	Oh, the learning is more important than any piece of paper.
Interviewer:	So you don't think that the examination is necessarily the most important thing?
Student:	You mean the entrance exam?
Interviewer:	No, I mean the Masters degree . . . for instance some people have the attitude that it does not really matter what I do while I am here just as long as I get my Masters Certificate at the end of it, that is all that matters to help to get a job afterwards. Do you feel that way or do you feel that the actual taking part is important too?
Student:	I think taking part is much more important, and the certificate is important too, that is very important, of course the learning is important too.
Interviewer:	OK . . . Well, is there anything else that you would like to say to me?
Student:	About this?
Interviewer:	About this or anything else . . . we are almost finished here now, so I just wanted to know if there was anything that you wanted to ask me or wanted to know about the project or anything else. It is wide open to you to say or not to say anything that you want to, you do not have to, it is entirely your choice, I am just giving you a chance.
Student:	Well I think I have already talked about it.
Interviewer:	Well that is fine and thank you very much for your assistance, it has been a great help, so thank you very much. I will see you at the next interview.

Appendix 10: IoE Ethics approval for Doctoral Student Research project

Institute of Education, University of London
Ethics Approval for Doctoral Student Research Projects: Data Sheet

Please read the notes before completing the form

Project title	INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS CROSS-CULTURAL ADAPTATION TO DIFFERENT ACADEMIC EXPECTATIONS		
Student Name	BARRY JOHN MCGOLGAN		
Supervisor	PROF. PAUL MORRIS		
Advisory committee members			
School/Unit	FPS	Faculty	POLICY & SOCIETY
Intended start date of data collection	OCTOBER 2009		
Funder	SELF FUNDED		
Professional Ethics code used	BERA (2004)		

Has this project been considered by another (external) Research Ethics Committee?

If your research is based in another institution then you may be required to submit your research to that institution's ethics review process. If your research involves patients or staff recruited through the NHS then you will need to apply for ethics approval through an NHS Local Research Ethics Committee. In either of these cases, you don't need ethics approval from the Institute of Education. If you have gained ethics approval elsewhere, please detail it here:

NOT APPLICABLE.

Research participants

Does the research involve human participants?

- ☒ Yes, as a primary source of data (e.g. through interviews)
☐ Yes, as a secondary source of data (e.g. using existing data sets)
☐ No Please explain _____

If the research involves human participants, who are they? (tick all that apply)

- ☐ Early years/pre-school
☐ School-aged children
☐ Young people aged 17-18
☐ Unknown
☒ Adults please describe them below

NON-UK POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS WITH A MINIMUM AGE OF 21 YEARS.

Research methods to be used (tick all that apply – this information will be recorded on a database of the types of work being presented to Ethics Committees)

- ☒ Interviews
☒ Focus groups
☒ Questionnaire
☐ Action research
☒ Observation
☐ Other _____
- ☐ Systematic review
☐ Randomised controlled trial
☒ Literature review
☐ Use of personal records